WHOSE INTERESTS ARE BEST SERVED THROUGH THE ADOPTION OF A MAGNET PROGRAM? A CASE STUDY OF A SMALL URBAN SCHOOL AND THE STRUGGLE OVER RACE AND GEOGRAPHY

BY

AMOS LEE

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Sharon Tettegah, Chair
Professor Anne Haas Dyson
Professor Helen Neville
Associate Professor Wenhao David Huang

ABSTRACT

This study used qualitative methods to investigate a magnet program within an elementary school located in a small urban city in the Midwest. The school, Robert Smalls, hosted a STEM magnet program to attract white families to send their children into a majority Black neighborhood. Case study methodology was used in the exploration of Robert Smalls as an instantiation of the larger phenomenon of interest - Black student experiences in magnet programming. The purpose in studying Black student experiences was to better understand the consequences of implementing magnet programs that were structured in ways that catered to and benefited white families' curricular interests (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The questions addressed in this study centered on what role race and geography played in the magnet reform and how Black students experienced the magnet program as they interacted with their peers and teachers.

There were three major findings within this study. The first finding was that the racialized geography within Prairie's local context shaped the way magnet reform was enacted at Robert Smalls, which then shaped the consequences for Black students within the school. The second finding was that based on the local context in which the magnet reform was enacted, fifth grade teachers at Robert Smalls prioritized magnet based constraints instead of addressing the needs of the Black student participants. The third major finding was that the district's concession to white demands in regards to gifted programming played a role in a racialized social hierarchy that formed between white and Black students. This racialized hierarchy disadvantaged Black students' opportunities to learn and participate in STEM content.

These findings together point to a magnet program that did not automatically benefit Black children. Instead the magnet constraints, structural forms of racism embedded within the

magnet program, and a racialized social hierarchy that formed from catering to white interests limited Black students' magnet based opportunities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: JUST NOT THE RIGHT FIT

For parents, choosing a school for kindergarten enrollment is no minor affair. I[1] remember arriving at my daughter's pre-school earlier than usual and sitting outside the classroom on a hard wooden bench, waiting for circle time to end. It was during this time that Linus'[2] mother (white female) and I had a memorable conversation. The chorus of children sang together on the carpet as we waited, and we began to discuss a very common topic among all the parents with four-year-old children: kindergarten plans. While my four-year-old daughter was my first child, Linus' mother had a five-year-old daughter that already went through the process of picking and applying for a school the year before. I asked her where her daughter went to school. She winced when she told me. Because I have lived in the community for close to two decades I knew that the school mentioned was geographically situated on the northside of town, the predominantly Black[3] side of town. Based on watching her writhe in agitation at the mention of the school name, I asked if it was her first choice. It was not.

I then asked her how she ended up at the school her daughter currently attended. Her answer was not surprising. Her husband had read in the newspaper that this particular north side school had a new magnet program that sounded interesting. Based on the father's description of the program, Linus' mother put the school as their fifth and last choice, thinking it would not happen. However, the schools she picked for her first four choices were also the most popular

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[1] Korean American Male

[2] Pseudonym

[3] Black is capitalized because the word Black refers to a nationality and ethnic group within the United States as people of the African diaspora (Tharps, 2014). Further, Black is capitalized and used instead of African-American because while the term Black was initially a term to separate and denigrate a people group as non-white, the word has presently been reclaimed and accepted as a legitimate name to represent a group of people. The term white is also not capitalized by choice to highlight a socio-political environment in which Caucasian dominance is the norm within every economic, political, social, and religious fabric in the United States and where Black equality is still not a reality.

schools in the district and regularly turned away many families seeking admission to their respective kindergarten classrooms.

Linus' mother already knew the names of the schools she wanted her daughter to attend by heart, even though she was not from the area. They were all on the south side of town. But just because she wanted specific schools did not mean they would be available. While the district had twelve elementary schools, some were consistently more popular and some were consistently less popular, among parents who had to decide where to enroll their children. If the schools that were over chosen did not have space, based on a myriad of enrollment factors, the computer program went onto the next choice listed. No amount of complaining at the district office or trying to enroll again would make a difference. Either Linus' sister attended the school she was assigned to by the computer program, or be placed on a waiting list with no guarantee of admission. Linus' mother sounded exasperated as she recounted the entire event to me. I was a fellow parent, perhaps someone with similar concerns. What she did not know about me is that my research interests focus on the inequalities in public schooling based on geography (where people live) and racial discrimination within diverse but segregated communities. My prolonged silence after she finished her story prompted her to eventually say, that the school was just "fine" and that her daughter is doing "well there," but still, she would say, the school was "just not the right fit."

I have heard this coded language before that sounds reasonable at first, but when further examined, has deeper implications in public schooling. What makes one school, less of a fit for a particular child than another? And what does it mean when a parent describes a school as "just not the right fit" for their child? The phrase is general and tame enough not to elicit charges of racism, ambiguous enough to wonder what areas are being discussed, and suspicious enough to

rethink the person's intention when saying it. School of choice where parents rank their preferences, was not based on historical precedents. Orfield (2013) noted, that in the past this discussion of where to send a child to school was not a major issue for parents. Most parents who had school aged children sent them to the school closest to their home. However, with the rise of white flight to neighboring suburbs, the historical legacy of segregated housing, and the continued racist attitudes towards schools with a Black and/or Brown majority led to a frenzy, over which schools were considered suitable for white middle class children.

The solution to such issues was sadly not to provide more equitable opportunities for Black and Brown children who have been historically discriminated against. Instead, the focus was on creating an educational marketplace where white parents could shop for the public school they wanted their child to attend. Proponents of school of choice believed that creating a market, in which schools were forced to compete for children, would magically make "all schools better" in the process (Orfield, 2013). Based on this view, increasing competition between public schools would force those same schools to adapt and update their curricular offerings in order to attract a wide variety of families from the community. Those schools that successfully reinvented their academic and non-curricular offerings would find success by way of increased enrollment. Schools that did not offer "meaningful educational commodities" would be chosen less often and eventually exit the system (e.g., Chicago school closures) (p. 21).

Conveniently, no mention of the racism that is directly related to school inequalities are mentioned in the educational market debate. The systemic racial discrimination against communities of color by way of reduced funding, is not mentioned as well. But, why are these issues not mentioned? Who benefits from not mentioning the legacy of white supremacy and privilege that has mired public education for students of color? Rather than focusing on

completely dismantling the continued legacy of unequal schooling for Black students that was racist and systematic (Bell, 1987; Robinson, 2000), the main focus today is on the idea of free market choice as the *best* solution. So the journey continues in public education, where mid to large size school districts with diverse student populations (i.e., racial, socioeconomic) and unfair segregated housing, continue to try and remake schools with special offerings (e.g., enhanced curriculum, additional curricular offerings, after school care, sports, orchestra). School districts then hope that these special offerings would "overcome" the school's geographic location and all the racist and biased implications that come with schools in non-white neighborhoods (Richards, 2014; Rothstein, 2017).

In trying to convince white families to voluntarily choose schools located in non-white areas has been a great challenge. The increase in white flight has also been considered a long-standing problem for many mid to large size school districts (Orfield, 2013). Further, urban cities who continue to struggle keeping white families within school boundaries have resorted to creating specific schools that encompass higher end neighborhoods (e.g., New York Public Schools). The goal then, is to keep white families from leaving no matter the costs to Black students who continue to attend segregated schools. This goal also accepts white flight as a natural phenomenon, instead of as a purposeful action in which racial biases play out in everyday life. The goal then should not be to cater to white families who have the privilege to seek alternative educational opportunities unless their needs are met (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Especially, when the geography and racial makeup of schools are so biased and discriminatory against Black children (Orfield, 2013; Richards, 2014). In America, a school with a Black student majority has been labeled as underachieving, dangerous, and dilapidated (Rothstein, 2017). These stereotypes then play a major role as families orchestrate their choices on where to

send their children to school. Since segregation is still rampant within the U.S. housing system (Lee, 2004; Frankenberg, 2013; Orfield & Eaton, 1997; Roda & Wells, 2013), the geographic location of a school can be a clear indicator of the attractiveness of that school. In this study, this intersection of race, geography, and school of choice are central to better understanding Black students' experiences in a magnet school focused on attracting more white families.

Background to the Problem

Urban school districts (e.g., Rockford, IL; Buffalo; NY; St. Louis, MO) face the problem of white flight while simultaneously trying to reduce inequitable outcomes for Black children in segregated schools (Bell, 1987; Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Orfield, 2013). For example, the magnet programs in Buffalo, New York (1985) became a model for urban schools across the nation by promoting white integration in predominantly Black schools by implementing special curricular magnet programs and extracurricular support (Bell, 2004; Lomotey & Staley, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Even though the model eventually fell apart, resulting in schools becoming segregated again, the support within the white community for these programs and the entrance of white children into predominantly Black schools was seen as a monumental success, albeit short lived. Magnet programs often received federal funding in order to provide this extracurricular programming that was not offered in other neighborhood schools. Since there was and is significant opposition against forcing integration of white children into predominantly Black schools (e.g., Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1), perhaps providing more opportunities and incentives could attract white enrollment?

Yet, whose best interest do magnet programs that incentivize white enrollment in schools with Black majorities serve? What do Black children experience in their schools when they undergo magnet programs focused on curbing white flight? Desegregation efforts are still

considered the hallmark approach to providing equitable schooling for Black children, especially since schools that are racially segregated have shown high levels of inequality (Rothstein, 2004; Orfield, 1997). Separate will never be equal (Carter, 2013). However, does reaching the goal of desegregation mean that equality is achieved? I sought to answer these questions through the experiences and voices of Black children as they lived through the complexities of desegregation practices within their school (i.e., magnet programs, gifted programs). These practices are contextualized within a local setting where the school district tried to convince white families, through the use of magnet programs, to send their children to a school located in the Black north end of town. The school site, Robert Smalls STEM[4] Academy[5] represented the complexities and intersections of race, geography (school location), and school of choice for Black children.

While desegregation efforts were made all over the country (e.g., Rockford, Buffalo, St. Louis), my chief concern is beyond general statistics or trends. Research (i.e., qualitative research) must delve deeper into what happens in the *everyday experiences* of Black children as they participate in their school's magnet programs before the conclusion is given that school equity has been achieved. Especially when the measures of equity revolves around test scores and enrollment factors (i.e., race). This study, thus seeks to further examine the local decisions and context where a magnet school operates and investigates the learning opportunities that Black students who attended the school, experienced through the magnet reform process.

Research Questions

The research agenda is guided by the following research questions:

[4] STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. STEM was originally used as an acronym in Congress (2005) to study the importance of STEM topics in the American economic fabric and the term caught on from that point on.

[5] Pseudonym used.

1) How do local decisions and contexts shape magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district?
    a) What role does race and geography play in the local decisions and context regarding magnet reform?
2) How do Black students experience learning opportunities related to the magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district?
    a) How do Black students exercise or demonstrate agency (i.e. human capacity to act) as they interact with their teachers and peers in a magnet based school?

By answering these questions, I sought to address the ways in which magnet programming could be improved as well as cautionary tales based on the everyday experiences of Black students attending Robert Smalls. I also sought to better understand the daily implications and realities of the Black focal participants as they experienced STEM learning opportunities related to the magnet program.

Theoretical Sketch

Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn, Ladson-Billings, 2013) and Critical Space Perspective (CSP) (Soja, 2010) are the two main theoretical frames used in this case study. Both provide a critical framework in which to contextualize how magnet programs were structured and implemented in local school districts based on past history and the community context (e.g., race, racism, segregated housing, racial community discord, school location). One key component of critical theory in education (Freire, 1970) asks the question of who benefits from certain actions or inactions or ways of thinking. CRT, as an application of critical theory by way of critical legal studies, places race and racism at the forefront when asking the question of who benefits from

actions, decisions, and outcomes within public school systems. Specifically, as it relates to this case study, who benefits from desegregation of public schools, who benefits from magnet programs, and who benefits from controlled choice systems in diverse towns and cities? The answers to these questions help uncover the long history of inequitable schooling for Black students in the U.S., which continues to plague public schools today.

In addition, CRT also provides a critique on how education reforms, such as school of choice and magnet programs, continue to prioritize and benefit the interests of white families over families of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This principle argues "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (Bell, 2004, p. 35). For example, in education, allowing some Black students to enter into all white schools was self-serving, as President Lyndon B. Johnson enacted funding cuts to schools that continued to purposefully segregate (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These explanations for the continued self-interest of white families at the expense of Black families were described by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated that "critical theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 49) within public education. This radical critique stems from their recognition that both gender-based and class-based understandings of inequity do not account for all the differences between a white majority and a non-white minority. Therefore, race must be placed back into the center of educational research in order to address whiteness that has been "naturalized" and issues of race that have been "oversimplified" (Roediger, 1999, p.15).

These racial conflicts in terms of where a white child and a Black child can go to school also manifested within the geography of Prairie community. Based on this intersection of race

and geography, Critical Space Perspective (Soja, 2010) offers a meaningful framework to think about space as both a physical location and also as a social and racial construction. This socially constructed intersection when applied to this case study provides a deeper understanding of a community as they struggle over racism, geography, and desegregation of public schools. White parents were reluctant to send their children to schools outside their majority white neighborhoods (Wells, Warner, & Gresikowski, 2013) and the reasons behind this reluctance were explained through the principles of CRT and CSP. Critical Spatial Perspective (2010) also offers a useful framework in better understanding the consequences that both physical and socially constructed spaces[6] have on the everyday life within a community (e.g., education system).

In addition, CSP provides insights into how the geographic location of schools within racially segregated communities, play a large role in segregated schooling. Having spatial awareness then means understanding not only the geographical consequences of a specific school location but also understanding that space is socially and collectively produced. In other words, a school's geographic location in the community has consequences for what happens within that school including student demographics, peer interactions, curricular focuses, and teacher priorities that all converge within the lived school space (Soja, 2010). Discrimination based on a school's location is also a consequence of geography that is socially designed and produced.

In this case study, the bias imposed on north end schools that continually failed to attract white families were based on the biases against Black families who lived in the north end of town (geographical location). These white biases against schools located in predominantly Black areas of town continued to produce spatial injustice by organizing spatial structures that privilege

[6] Space and geography are used interchangeably within the text

and advance white interests over Black interests. Socially and geographically constructed spaces, such as local schools, can thus either empower and/or disempower student agency within the daily structures and processes within the classroom (Orfield, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). The consequences of lived spaces are important to the equity discussions revolving around the usefulness of magnet programs in choice systems. These geographic consequences must be taken into consideration when trying to promote a more equitable schooling system for Black students, who have faced historical discrimination within public schooling.

Local Site: Context and Significance

Robert Smalls STEM Academy was originally built in the northeast section of Prairie city. This north end of town had a long and rich history for the Black community. At the same time this section of town was where the majority of Black families resided due to restrictive covenants and racism within the community that segregated housing based on one's race. This segregation dates back to the Great Migration. Even Black college students who attended the local land grant university, had to reside in the northeast section due to restrictions on co-living with white college students in the dormitories.

The north end in which Robert Smalls is located is affectionately called the *historic north end* by many in the community. This historic north end was a bedrock of Black activism that fought the city, school district, and local university against racist practices and policies directed toward Black Americans. Discrimination in transportation, schooling, housing, and banking were all interrogated and deconstructed. Due to Black activists the Black community in the north end made major strides, yet many injustices still remained. Progress was not the same as equality, and Black activists sought equal treatment in all spheres of public and private life including a fair education for Black students, which has been historically denied in Prairie (Local newspaper,

February 13, 2011). Therefore, the rich history and conflict between the Black and white communities contextualizes the current educational climate Robert Smalls is situated in.

Robert Smalls was originally built for the Black community. The school originally had all Black students, all Black teachers, and a Black administrator. Historically, white children who lived in the northeast end would be bussed to schools outside those neighborhoods. While Robert Smalls was traditionally an all Black school, in 1968 during the Civil Rights movement, the school became the focus of voluntary desegregation efforts and was turned into a magnet school for the arts, in order to entice white families to enroll their children. This legacy of using magnet programs to attract white families into Black schools (Robert Smalls) continued on. However, with the increase in white flight to neighboring towns, the creation of over ten private schools, and the continued housing segregation between south and north end homes built a rising racial tension in the community. The majority who lived in the city of Prairie was white; however, the percentage of Black and white students in the public school system was about the same.

Prairie school district thus faced a quandary. White families did not want to attend schools on the northeast end of town. These schools were outside their mostly white neighborhoods in the south end of town and were predominantly Black. However, the district could not willfully promote segregated schools and since the 1970s the school district has steadily closed more schools on the north end than the south end. Also, instead of integrating white children in north end schools, Prairie decided to bus Black students to the white majority schools on the south end. In 1996, when a complaint was filed by a Black parent with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), 550 Black students were regularly bussed from their north end homes to south end schools in order to meet racial quotas. This practice placed an unfair burden on Black families. The original OCR complaint was followed up by another lawsuit claiming racial

discrimination in the areas of discipline, special education placement, and grade discrepancy for Black students. Instead of a judgment against the school district, which had financial repercussions, a consent decree[7] (mutual agreement) was made in which the court would oversee and evaluate the reforms implemented to address these racial inequalities for Black students.

The consent decree was not well received by the white dominated school board or administration team, and in the first few years very little was accomplished. Black activists went back to court and the district hired its first Black superintendent and his personnel team from a southern state, to implement the consent decree with fidelity. Part of that consent decree required that more seats be added to the north end to serve the Black community, but also that the district would make progress on desegregating north end schools. But again, how does Prairie school district convince white families to send their children to schools outside of their neighborhood and into schools that were majority Black?

Instead of the district forcing white families into north end schools, a decision to implement a controlled choice program was used. While the controlled choice program had found success in northeastern cities, using controlled choice at first exacerbated segregated schools within Prairie, as noted by Black community activists. Convincing white families to openly choose schools on the north end proved to be problematic even with newly built facilities. The district changed gears and applied for, won, and implemented magnet programming in order to desegregate north end schools (including Robert Smalls) by enticing white families with curricular offerings not provided in south end schools. However, even with the magnet programming in place for multiple years, in 2016, the north end schools when compared to the south end schools continued to be in low demand with white parents.

[7] A legal suit was brought by parents of a Black student against Prairie school district for educational discrimination. Prairie in response agreed to a consent decree which was a court monitored judicial mandate to address and rectify inequalities that existed for Black students within the school system.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods with an ethnographic approach in order to examine the lived experiences of Black children at Robert Smalls. Robert Smalls implemented a STEM magnet program designed to desegregate the school. The implications of the STEM program on Black children were of interest in this study, especially based on the local history and context of the school as explained above. While, curricular, instructional, and programmatic suggestions will be offered as implications later on, this study does not serve as a program evaluation in the traditional sense of looking at outcome based scores (e.g., test scores). Rather, I seek to better understand, through the several participants, their understanding, experiences, and agency associated with their learning experiences, as they participated in Robert Smalls' magnet program.

In order to gain this deeper understanding, while observing the 5th grade classrooms[8], I chose two Black male students and two Black female students who, as focal participants, would provide meaningful data for my research questions. By observing and noting their STEM learning experiences and by recording and observing their peer interactions, I as a participant observer, sought to enter their world and see how they made sense of their everyday lives at Robert Smalls. During STEM learning, three 5th grade classes (two general education classrooms and one gifted classroom) met together to work on the STEM activities. In this setting, two Black female participants from the general education classrooms were selected due to their troubling interactions with their peers from the gifted classroom. These interactions

[8] At Robert Smalls, each grade level had three classrooms. Two of these classrooms were designated as the general education classrooms and comprised of students whose parents chose this school through the School of Choice program. A majority of them were from the surrounding neighborhoods. One of the three classrooms was designated by Prairie school district as a gifted classroom. Students, in this classroom, had to test in at an earlier grade, or test in from another school within the district. All first graders are universally screened for "giftedness" and students at any grade level at any school could take the test annually.

limited their access and opportunity to participate fully in the STEM activity. This social dynamic was meaningful, given the context of this study, as the magnet program promoted self-contained gifted classrooms as a draw for white parents who traditionally would not have chosen Robert Smalls for their children to attend.

The Black male student participants were also from the two general education classrooms and were chosen because they were active in confronting their gifted peers when they disagreed with them (student agency). Both of the male participants also were not shy about expressing their views and advocating for their ideas within the Mission 5 group setting. The Black female and male participants based on the teacher's knowledge were also from the surrounding neighborhood rather than from the predominantly white, south end of town. This qualifying residential factor was key because I wanted to see what the daily lived experiences were for students who originally attended Robert Small's prior to the magnet adoption that catered to white interests.

Ten weeks were spent recording observations, collecting documents, and audio recordings at Robert Smalls. During these ten weeks, 35 separate site visits occurred that lasted two hours each. During this period, time was spent observing the main participants as well as other Black student participation within the STEM learning activities. The conversations they held with their peers and teachers were also recorded to help write field notes and document evidence pertaining to the research questions. Field notes, transcriptions, and documents were then coded and analyzed thematically in order to organize my findings chapters related to access and equity issues for Black children, in the fifth grade at Robert Smalls.

Data from school records, official notes from meetings, along with local newspaper clippings, and judicial documents regarding the magnet program were also gathered to explore

the rich local history and context of Prairie school district. These documents pointed to a racialized history of housing and schooling within Prairie for Black families as well as documentation about past desegregation attempts through the use of magnet programming. Further, the struggle between Black activists and a retrenched school district that feared white flight, dominated the narrative regarding equitable schooling practices for Black children in the district. The struggle over racism, geographic location of schools, desegregation practices, and white flight, gives a richer context to better understanding the lived experiences of Black students from the north end of town.

Significance of the Study

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue, "the voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (p. 58). Without their voices and experiences, it would be easy to think that a school implementing a federally funded magnet would be interpreted as providing equal opportunities and access for both Black and white students. Yet, as chapter five and six will show, even with the implementation of a magnet program, equality is elusive. Progress and improvement, while important, is not the same as full equality and to accept improvement when it comes to educating Black children without continuing to demand for a fair and equal education is unacceptable. This study, then, dives deeper into the everyday experiences of Black students who were from the surrounding neighborhood and who would have traditionally attended the school. Their lived experiences and voices helped contextualize the magnet program in order to better understand the ways in which magnet programming helped and/or hurt Black students' opportunities to learn STEM material.

In addition, judging the outcome of magnet programs by whether or not white families enrolled their children in a Black majority school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) continues to

not recognize “the experiential knowledge of people of color” (Matsuda, et. al., 1993, p. 6) and takes for granted the consequences of geography (Soja, 2010). Housing segregation and school segregation are intertwined (Orfield, 2013) and the location of a school in a predominantly white neighborhood or Black neighborhood mattered within the city of Prairie. The reluctance of white families to send their children into schools located in majority Black neighborhoods continued to promote segregated schools. To make matters worse, catering to white interests in the hope of luring them back to schools they did not wish to attend in the first place, does little to support Black student interests and needs (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Bell, 2004; Hannah-Jones, 2016). To counteract the majoritarian narrative of school districts promoting white educational interests and claiming that doing so also benefits Black educational interests (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016), the specific voices and stories from Black students are necessary. These stories and voices document both the inequity and discrimination that continues after schools have adopted a magnet desegregation plan.

The significance of Robert Smalls within Prairie is that just by its mere location in the Black north end, the school provides a window into the daily practices and lived experiences of Black students based on an educational system that continues to cater to white interests. The focus of the consent decree was to create systematic change in how Prairie provided educational services to Black students and to rectify the discriminatory practices that placed undue burden on Black students and their families. Yet, as this case study will show, catering to white educational interests (magnet programming) to overcome geographic biases does not guarantee improvement of educational opportunities for Black students. Furthermore, catering to white interests in the district also has its own implications within the everyday practices and events within the school building, especially for Black children. By studying Robert Smalls and the everyday experiences

of Black students within the school, a deeper understanding into the ways in which magnet programs can either empower or disempower Black students within the school setting is achieved (Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996; Solórzano & Yosso, 2016).

The Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the case study by describing the history, context, and background of the case at hand. The significance and importance of the work is also explained in this chapter.

Chapter 2 begins with a literature review describing the history and current landscape around school of choice and the ways that this choice promotes inequality. The theoretical framework used in this study follows this literature review. Both Critical Race Theory (Bell, 2004) and Critical Space Perspective (Soja, 2010) offer a lens where race and geography intersect and play out in everyday life within schools.

Chapter 3 focuses on methods. This study takes a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods where the researcher becomes a participant observer in the field. By entering and observing the classroom, I sought to better understand the world of the focal participants. The details and methods used to collect data and better understand the site and participants is explained as well.

Chapter 4 focuses on explaining the unequal system that is present within Prairie for Black students. Through document analysis, connecting themes from local newspaper clippings, official school documents, and notes from school meetings are put together to answer the questions: How do local decisions and contexts shape magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district and what role do race and geography play in the local decisions and context regarding magnet reform?

Chapter 5 focuses on the focal participants' experiences as they participated in the magnet programming at Robert Smalls and answered the following question: How do Black students experience learning opportunities related to the magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district?

Chapter 6 focuses on answering the question of how do Black students exercise or demonstrate agency (i.e. human capacity to act) as they interact with their peers in a magnet based school? The focal participants' interactions with their peers are analyzed and presented in this chapter.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the findings and concludes with a discussion connecting my assertions and findings to the larger landscape of public education and school of choice. The struggle over race and geography is discussed through the lens of the focal participants and their everyday experiences and interactions at Robert Smalls.

CHAPTER 2: THE INTERSECTION OF RACE, GEOGRAPHY, AND SCHOOL OF CHOICE

The intersection of race, geography, school of choice systems, and magnet programs play a complex role within U.S. schooling. To better understand this intersection, the history of segregated schools as well as the relationship between schools and property rights are further explored in this chapter. The context in which segregation, desegregation, school of choice, and magnet programs commingle within public schools, tells a story about the journey for greater Black equality within school spaces. In this journey of addressing racial segregation and unequal schooling for Black children, the school districts concessions to white families' interests continued to conflict with providing a better education for Black students in public schools. Therefore, a critique is provided of today's educational landscape in which school of choice[9] and magnet programs are still the most chosen method to address racial disparities in mid to large urban school districts.

While some may argue that the push for equality in public schools has dramatically improved due to all students having access to a K-12 school within the U.S., the current reality is much more complicated. Public schools are segregating once again at an alarming rate due to a school's geographic location, school funding issues, and based on gerrymandering of school attendance zones (Orfield, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013; Richards, 2014). This resegregation of public schools is not by accident but a result of white flight as parents leave city schools for more affluent neighborhoods in the suburbs. Furthermore, with recent court decisions (e.g., *Parents Involved v.* Seattle), race as the sole factor of student placement in schools is no longer allowed without a compelling reason, which has contributed to the resegregation of American public

[9] School of choice are used interchangeably with controlled choice programs in districts. School of choice used in this context does not refer to the battle over charter schools.

schools (Orfield, 2001).

Given this context this literature review serves two purposes. The first is to provide the relevant literature and background to better understand the history behind school of choice as well as the problems associated with the movement[10]. Within this school of choice movement, the use of magnet schools, which originally were devised as a way to promote desegregation, is explored and problematized. The second role of this chapter is to provide the theoretical framework for this study. The two major theories used in this research are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Spatial Perspective (CSP). CRT and CSP together provide an important and useful lens as race and geography intersect within school of choice practices.

School of Choice Systems

Overview

School of choice has played a prominent role within U.S. schooling for the past half century (Orfield and Frankenberg, 2013). Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, schools across the country had to find ways to desegregate and provide more equitable opportunities for Black children, who had been historically marginalized within public schools. In a perfect and just society, school districts would have provided reparations to the Black community by addressing and supporting their educational needs. However, the devastating and lingering effect that racism, white dominance, and segregation (e.g., geographically, socially) had within communities continued to plague public schools' journey towards desegregation (Bell, 2004). Notably, most schools with white majorities in the south, north, and west were reluctant to

[10] What is commonly understood as the school of choice movement in the public is the voucher debate between public and private schools. In this chapter, the focus of this movement is less on the private/public debate and more on the controlled choice programs that unified school districts have been implementing to prevent segregation within district schools as well as preventing white flight out of the community.

integrate their student bodies until President Johnson's administration threatened the loss of federal funds for schools that continued to segregate (Orfield, 2013).

In many districts, President Johnson's decree forced the desegregation of public schools, which then resulted in massive white flight from urban areas to the surrounding suburbs (Orfield, 1997). In order to entice white families back to urban cities, school of choice systems provided an avenue for white families to have some control over the school their children went to instead of being solely assigned by the school district. Providing public schooling options for white parents in urban cities has proven popular, especially in districts that have large minority groups. School districts by implementing school of choice had a method to address housing segregation patterns through the criteria used in their choice systems and parents had more control over which schools their children could attend. Thus, school of choice systems were seen as mutually beneficial for the school district and for white parents. However, as described later in this chapter, choice is only fair when all parties involved have the same knowledge and opportunities to participate within the system. In addition, the issue of race within schooling systems and the multiple choices that litter the current educational landscape, like magnet programs, are further explored and problematized.

Historical and Legal Background on Choice

The ideas behind school of choice are tied to the American ideals of freedom and the market economy. Having choices was seen as inherently beneficial within American society. Choosing which products to purchase, having a choice as to what job to take, or even where to live was and is fundamental to American life. This freedom of choice also applied towards the idea that families should have options when considering schools. Yet, as Orfield (2013) notes while the idea of having a choice was strongly rooted within America's ideals of what freedom

entailed, educational choice systems were not inherently an American tradition or a "basic American right" (p. 19). Throughout the vast history of public schooling, children have generally been assigned to a specific public school within their zone or community, and not given the choice or option of attending another school.

Also, public schools in the U.S. were traditionally created and designed to provide a necessary service to communities and not to individuals. If parents did not want to send their children to the assigned school the only options left were private schools or homeschools. As Orfield (2013) further stated, "educational choice within school districts is no more an American tradition than choice about police or fire service" (p. 19). Schools were thus designed as a public good in which they provided a common service akin to a city's bus system or park district. Yet, the idea of choosing a school continued to gain steam after segregation was outlawed legally and enforced executively through the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In response to forced integration, the ideas behind school of choice grew as white parents and white school districts sought to retain segregated schooling (Kantor & Lowe, 2013).

Therefore, it can be argued that the origins of educational choice were based on discrimination towards Black families when it came to integrated schooling options (Rothstein, 2017). The discrimination towards Black families often involved a lack of resources for schools located within the Black communities. Forced integration historically, was also a one-way endeavor (Orfield & Eaton, 1997). For Black parents, the only choice in accessing a school with more resources was to send their children to white majority schools where they were not welcomed and where they had to face complicated procedures to enroll. This was not the same for white families because they generally were not interested in enrolling their children in Black majority schools. Thus, equal access to all schooling options available were not present when

schools were forced to originally integrate. Racial discrimination, racial harassment, and poor educational outcomes for Black children who attended white majority schools have been well documented (Rist, 1973; Robinson, 2000; Bell, 2004). The choice for Black families to send their children to all white schools was unfair since their children were not treated equally or given the appropriate support needed to be successful in schools designed for the white community (Bell, 2004). However, even with these limitations, the idea behind school of choice continued to gain traction in the latter half of the 20th century and continues today to be propagated in mid to large urban cities and towns that continually cater to white interests.

To better understand the reasons why choice became such a well-accepted idea within American education and why choice was promoted by the last five U.S. presidents, the link between choice and desegregation must be explored given the despondent racial landscape in America. Choice is deeply tied to the racial struggles within the U.S. and the ensuing white flight that occurred out of urban schools into the suburbs (Oakes, 2005; Lee, 2004; Frankenberg, 2013; Orfield & Reardon, 1994). School of choice originally began in the 1960s after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, which overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and ruled that separate but equal schools were inherently unequal and breached the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. Trying to enforce this decision in southern schools that were primarily segregated due to the long history of Jim Crow was no easy task. Choice plans, as mentioned before, were initially put in place to keep schools segregated by providing limited vouchers to Black students who wanted to attend white majority schools (Orfield, 2013).

In the U.S. south, the position held by most school districts was that providing a limited number of Black students the choice to attend a white majority school was enough to satisfy the equal protection clause (Stephanopoulos, 2016). Black students who chose to attend these white

majority schools had to undergo additional and complex procedures to transfer as well as an increased harassment that Black parents faced from white community members for their decision to integrate (Bell, 2004). Most Black families opted to keep their children in their current segregated schools instead of facing the onslaught of discrimination and violence directed at their children for attending white schools (2004). Therefore, the schools in the south remained mostly segregated even though unfair choice systems were enacted. It was not until the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in which Title VI prohibited institutions receiving federal dollars to racially discriminate, did southern schools start their desegregation process.

President Lyndon Johnson's administration began in earnest to enforce this act, which resulted in most US southern school districts desegregating their student populations. Further legal rulings established by the Supreme Court decision from *Green v. New Kent County* (1968), ruled that school districts giving the choice to Black families to transfer their children to white schools was not enough to meet the constitutional requirements for full desegregation. In the court's opinion, segregation had to be dismantled in its entirety (Orfield, 2013). In response to the federal enforcement of Title VI and the judicial decision previously stated, the south provided even more vouchers to Black children to attend white majority schools; however, in the north and west school segregation was still rampant due to segregated housing within communities (Erickson, 2011).

Schools, in the northern and western part of the US, were also purposely built in locations based on segregated neighborhoods that would keep children of different races separated. Creating elaborate school boundaries that kept students of color from attending white majority schools became the norm (Orfield & Lee, 2007; Richards, 2014; Siegel-Hawley, 2013). Therefore, a majority of desegregation cases brought before the court system was found to be

guilty of practicing policies that enhanced the segregation of schools even though many school districts claimed their schools were a reflection of their neighborhoods and not based on racial discrimination (Frankenberg & DeBray, 2011). This argument was not accepted in the court system because many of the boundaries for these neighborhood schools were drawn purposefully along racial lines in order to segregate. These tightly drawn boundaries are still seen in the present day as exhibited in the Atlantic article, *The Privilege of School Choice* (Wall, 2017). In this article, an example is given of a New York public school (P.S. 199) that served a small set of residential blocks with extremely expensive housing. The school was consistently over chosen while other schools nearby were consistently under chosen. However, the exploding student population in P.S. 199 caused the board to change the school boundary lines removing apartment buildings that were previously included. This change in attendance zones set up a major conflict for families who specifically purchased homes in those buildings in order to send their children to the connected schools. The other schools that were within close proximity were a majority Black and Latina/o and were not seen as comparable to P.S. 199.

As seen in the previous example, creating attendance boundaries that segregate based on race and class is not a new phenomenon. In fact, many city officials and school districts agreed to these tight residential boundaries as de facto agreements with white middle class families in order to prevent them from fleeing the city altogether for the suburbs (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Bell, 2004). The plight for white families in deciding where to send their children to school is not however only restricted to major urban centers. Small to mid urban cities also experienced similar difficulties in convincing white families who lived in high priced neighborhoods to send their children to schools located in the predominantly Black and Brown parts of town (Orfield & Reardon, 1994). The legacies and implications of housing segregation

patterns and white flight continued to make desegregating schools within large and small urban cities a difficult endeavor.

Current Legal Landscape on Choice

As previously mentioned in the judicial case of *Green v. New Kent County* (1968), the Supreme Court decided that choice in and of itself was not enough to bring about greater equality for Black students. Districts would have to instill greater measures to desegregate. In the court's opinion, allowing Black children the chance to choose a white majority school was not adequate due to the harassment and social pressures within the community. Thus, if a school district argued that choice was employed in its effort to desegregate, actual results would have to be seen. If the way in which school districts structured choice plans increased segregation then those plans would be illegal. This more stringent ruling went against many of the cities in the North and the West (e.g., Boston, Cleveland, Indianapolis) and required them to employ a broader and more intensive desegregation plan that actually produced the intended outcomes. However, this ruling that required white majority school districts to have more elaborate desegregation plans was overturned in 1991.

In *Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (1991), the court ruled that the supervision of local school districts was a temporary measure to correct discriminatory practices; however, once school systems exhibited their compliance with the court ordered mandate, they could be relieved of the mandate with no further supervision. Many school districts who completed their desegregation orders dropped components of their choice plan that prevented racial resegregation and lost the progress made under the court's supervision. Further, in a 2007 case of *Parents Involved v. Seattle*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a decision that impacted most major urban cities on the role that race could play when it came to school assignments. The ruling stated that voluntary

desegregation plans based on race was unconstitutional and discriminatory, because not all students from different races were treated the same when it came to maintaining a racially diverse school. Due to this ruling, choice systems/plans had to use mainly non-racial factors (e.g., income level, parent's education, neighborhood) where colorblind attributes became the norm in assigning students to schools within the attendance boundaries. In this ruling, Chief Justice Roberts stated that the issue of school segregation was resolved and that integrating schools using a choice mechanism tied to race was unconstitutional and unnecessary.

The *Parents Involved v. Seattle* (2007) ruling prompted the United States Department of Education and the Department of Justice to write a letter of guidance on how to voluntarily use race when trying to satisfy the compelling interest of racial diversity and when trying to avoid racial isolation in K-12 schools. Within this guideline, parameters were given in which school districts that voluntarily tried to racially diversify their schools had to use "race-neutral" and "race-conscious" factors such as household income, parental educational level, and housing location first before considering race as a factor for school assignment. While race as the sole factor could not be used until "race-neutral" factors were considered. Justice Kennedy did not completely outlaw the use of race when considering student assignment in school districts. Race could be used to draw lines in different attendance zones and also could be used in conjunction with other factors such as socioeconomic status as Berkeley's choice system has shown (Frankenberg, 2013). However, if race is used on an individual basis, it must be narrowly tailored as a compelling interest in order to avoid scrutiny. Therefore, no quota systems could be employed and the use of race as a deciding factor on school placement became a complicated and suable endeavor.

As Orfield (2013) noted, the *Parents Involved v. Seattle* ruling struck down the most

common voluntary desegregation plans based on race as unconstitutional and left school districts to use less effective plans to try and promote integration. As Minow (2010), a Harvard legal professor stated at the time, the only remaining ways in which school districts could promote and create racially integrated schools were now solely through indirect means. These indirect means were less effective than being able to use race as a major factor in how choice plans were created and implemented. Desegregation plans that used race as a factor previously could no longer use race as the sole means to promote school integration. In Orfield's (2013) words,

> The kinds of choice that increased segregation were now legal and the kinds that had produced integration were prohibited, and the country was to abandon the goal of Brown or continue choice programs under policies that history had shown would probably produce increased segregation and inequality among schools (p. 39).

As researchers (Orfield and Frankenberg, 2013; Stephanopoulos, 2016; Scott, 2011) have noted, using indirect attributes that are color-blind has caused a resurgence in segregated schooling and have not been able to create the same diversity in schools that happened under the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Choice without the use of race as a major factor was limited in its effectiveness in desegregating schools within diverse urban cities (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

Problems with Free Market Principles on Choice Systems[11]

In most urban areas, housing segregation meant that neighborhood schools would be dominated by one race. In trying to entice white parents to choose schools located in predominantly minority neighborhoods, additional or enhanced academic programming was

[11] When discussing choice systems, this research focuses on unified districts with more than one school. Choice is not discussed in the context of schools across district lines or across neighboring city. Most of these districts are large urban to small urban cities and towns.

often used. These programs promoted a market mentality where parents could shop for the education they wanted. School districts witnessed from other city's examples (e.g., Buffalo) that increasing parental choice and schooling options were popular with white families (Erickson, 2011). The focus on parental choice was also based on the assumption and belief that creating a market with different choices would automatically lead to better outcomes than with more government regulations (Orfield, 2013). Therefore, educational philanthropists, legislatures, and even the last five U.S. presidents encouraged the "free market theory of choice" when it came to desegregating schools and providing the best outcome for students (Roda & Wells, 2013).

However, making education into a private commodity and believing that competition would lead to better schools was short sighted. As Orfield (2013) maintained,

> Today, however, color-blind choice has become a central part of the discussion of educational reform, based on a theory that challenges the American tradition of public schools controlled by local elected boards and assumes that semi-private schools are superior and unregulated individual choice will solve inequalities (p. 56).

The idea of choice changed in the 1970s and 1980s from a tool that was used to integrate schools into the notion that just by providing different schooling choices, educational inequality would be resolved (p. 52). This shift that focused on choice as the solution instead of as a tool was problematic given the past and present history of racial discrimination in America. Focusing on color-blind choice programs as the ultimate solution in addressing racial segregation was a flawed approach (Scott, 2011; Orfield, 2013), but judicially supported (*Parents Involved vs. Seattle*, 2007).

The widespread use of choice programs for student assignments came after Cambridge Public Schools' success in 1980 with desegregating schools. The popularity with this method of

school assignment was due to not requiring the desegregation of neighborhoods within the city in order to achieve desegregated schools. Parents were now given a choice in where they could send their children to school and were not only restricted to neighborhood schools closest to their residence. Controlled choice (also known as school of choice in this study) also gave districts the ability to look beyond just assigning students to the schools closest to their homes. However, major problems with controlled choice continued to plague public school systems as the ideas behind controlled choice plans were dependent on free market principles (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

In the following section, free market principles and their application to controlled choice systems are problematized in order to show the limitations of adopting a market orientation to school systems and processes. One major tenant from free market theory is that there has to be equal opportunity and information for parents making a decision on where to send their child for school. However, having enough information to decide on which school is best was no easy matter. Even if all the required information was given (i.e., test scores, demographic data) on a website or newsletter, the history behind a school is not so easily described or explained. In addition, if there are many schools in a district all with different programs, the sheer amount of information can be difficult to assess and understand. Since the information from the school districts might be hard to digest, the geographic location of a school and its surrounding neighborhood can become the key factor in how parents rank schools they prefer (Siegel-Hawley, 2013). Families with longer ties to the area or who can access insider knowledge of the schools in unified districts also have an advantage over those who cannot (Richards & Stroub, 2015). Language barriers, limited housing options, and the sheer amount of information required to make a decision involving an individual school in larger school districts can make the choice

difficult (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

Another tenant of free market theory applied to school of choice is that by merely providing options, a win-win scenario is created. It is assumed that with the newfound ability for parents to make choices on which schools to enroll their child, the competition between schools to attract families would pressure under chosen schools to improve in order to capture more of the market. Orfield (2013) referred to the idea of competition and improving all parties in the competitive process as Adam Smith's "invisible hand" within the school system. This "invisible hand" will reward schools that are effective in drawing parents to choose them and promotes the improvement of under chosen schools through the pressure of competition. However in no western capitalist society are markets completely free (2013). Regulations that prevent dishonesty, collusion, and cheating that bring about unfair competition are not mentioned when it comes to U.S. schooling. If the markets were allowed to have free reign with no regulation, the protections for the most vulnerable in society would not be guaranteed. In an uncontrolled free market system, schools could abuse their mission for the public good by catering completely to and accepting families who fall into specific wealth or racial categories rejecting families with more needs (e.g., language needs, special education needs, transportation needs, etc.) (Frankenberg, 2013).

In reality, capital markets also have winners and losers; and when applied to the field of education, the winners are the schools that are in high demand by parents and the losers are schools that are historically under chosen due to the racial composition of the student body, inadequate funding, geographic location in a non-white neighborhood, or a combination of these factors (Roda & Wells, 2013). As seen in massive school closings (e.g., Chicago), schools that are under chosen also do not always get the necessary attention or funding needed to make them

better. School districts that engage in a controlled choice system that is market-oriented are no different. Some schools within the district are over chosen[12] and some schools are under chosen. The market system caters to families with the most privilege to be able to access and attend schools with the highest funding and best facilities (Lubienski, 2007). Thus, market theory does not guarantee equal opportunity to all parents and families in a school district because "market choice theory is based on unexamined assumptions derived from a simplified version of an economic model that does not exist in any society" (Orfield, 2013, p. 79).

Educational Choice: Magnet Programs

Even with the inherent flaws in applying free market theory aimed at desegregating schools, magnet programs continue to be popular with school districts. Magnet programming can range from many different curricular programs (e.g., arts magnet, STEM magnet, college prep magnet, zoology magnet) that are specialized and different from traditional curriculum (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). These programs can and are often used to desegregate schools by attracting white families into Black and Brown majority schools. These magnet programs also are different than charter schools in that these programs are applied by and within the district. No change in governance is required to implement a magnet program (2008).

Magnet schools were first used in major cities due to large influx of minorities and the growing white flight out of the cities. Because school districts could not bus students over district lines in an effort to desegregate schools (Milliken v. Bradley, 1974), they had to somehow attract white families back into the city and also prevent more white families from leaving the school district all together. The only option then was to try and entice white families to stay or return

[12] More families apply for seats than are offered in the school. For example, if the kindergarten class had 69 seats available and 100 families placed the school as their first choice, the school would be over chosen by 31 seats.

back into the city. Magnet programs, by offering additional options, were useful in promoting desegregation by allowing parents to choose which school they wanted their child to attend instead of forcibly assigning students. The popularity of magnet programs across the country also speaks for itself, as "they are the largest set of schools of choice today" (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013, p. 131). Additionally, the many benefits of magnet programs continue to be the overwhelming narrative offered by many studies and their researchers (Betts, 2006; Bifulco, Cobb & Bell, 2009; Gamoran, 1996; Silver, Saunders, & Zarate 2008).

Bifulco, Cobb, and Bell (2009) documented increased proficiency test scores that occurred in reading and math exams in 50 magnet high schools in Connecticut when compared to traditional schools. Further, Betts, Rice, Zau, Tang and Koedel (2006) presented findings that showed a significant increase in math scores when comparing a high school magnet with a traditional school within the San Diego Unified School District (Betts, Rice, Zau, Tang & Koedel, 2006). Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg (2011) also reported that students attending magnets graduated high school in greater numbers than students in traditional public schools, showing the benefits of magnet schools over traditional schools. This finding of students graduating magnet high schools at a higher rate was also supported by a study, where Silver, Saunders and Zarate (2008) found that 73% of the students who attended a magnet high school graduated as compared to 45% of students who attended traditional public high schools in the same Los Angeles Unified District. This district served 48,000 students. These studies together show ample support for why magnet schools are beneficial when it comes to improving educational equity.

Magnet schools also attracted a larger percentage of Black and Latina/o students as well as a larger percentage of low-income students than traditional public schools did (Siegel-Hawley

& Frankenberg, 2011; Bifulco, Cobb & Bell, 2009; Penta, 2001). This statistic was meant to show that magnets did not only attract white families who could take most advantage of the magnet programs, but equally if not more benefited Brown and Black students as well. Data showed that Black and Latinx students enrolled in magnet schools at a higher rate when compared to enrollment in traditional schools.[13] Cobb et al. (2009) found that magnet students reported a "greater sense of community at school" and more "peer support" within the school to achieve academically (p. 10). This same study, from 50 inter-district magnet schools in Connecticut, found that magnet students reported "positive intergroup relations" and "less racial tension among peers" when compared to students attending traditional schools (2009).

While these benefits of magnet programs sound impressive, other researchers (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2011/2013; Scott, 2011; McDermott, DeBray, & Frankenberg, 2012; Orfield & Reardon, 1994; Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996) are quick to caution that while there are benefits to magnet programs when compared with traditional schools, the wide structural varieties of how magnets are created and implemented within local contexts vary to a great extent. No two magnets are the same because no two local contexts are the same. Therefore, the sheer variety in which school choice systems exist in order to meet specific community needs and issues, makes it difficult to rubber stamp magnet schools as beneficial to communities experiencing racially segregated and "underperforming" schools.

Further, a national context in which the Supreme Court de-emphasized the importance of school desegregation combined with a rise in test based accountability have placed pressure on communities that are the traditional adopters of magnet programs (Ballou, Goldring, & Liu,

[13] This study did not account for where the school was located in the community and what the enrollment demographic was prior to the magnet. Perhaps, the students who originally attended the school might have continued to enroll and attend after the addition of the magnet.

2006). Magnets must not only address traditional issues of racial segregation within schools but now must also increase math and reading test scores. As Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg (2013) note, magnet programs were designed to be innovative and offer learning opportunities and experiences that were not offered through traditional curricular areas. However, the way in which magnet schools were evaluated in terms of raising academic performance was through standardized math and reading test scores. Therefore, "this means that virtually all appraisals of the educational effects of magnets ignore the very aspects that make the programs magnetic" (p. 137). If the magnet was based on learning another language, or being able to start a commercial business, or learn how to play an instrument, these programs were not a part of the evaluation that decided whether student achievement increased. These national issues must be taken into account when understanding the local context. At the same time the local context also has its own sets of issues depending on the severity of housing segregation, funding issues, as well as past racial discord within the community.

Therefore more research into the localized ways that magnet schools operate is appropriate in evaluating the effectiveness of magnet programs within choice systems. Blank, Levine, and Steel (1996) agrees with the notion that more research is needed to assess magnet schools by asserting,

> To [fully] understand the effects of magnet schools on urban education, further studies and analyses need to examine the local decisions and context in which magnet schools operate, the extent to which magnet schools actually change the education process, and the extent to which students learning is improved (p. 171).

This dissertation, then, provides a qualitative approach (see chapter three) in order to examine the local decisions and context in which a magnet school operates as well as the way in which

the magnet program was structured (e.g., academic programming) by investigating students' opportunities to learn through their everyday experiences in a magnet-based school.

Theoretical Framework

The first major section of this literature review focused on the school of choice and magnet programming literature as it related to race and housing patterns. The second section of this chapter then shifts towards a theoretical framework that helps explain the manifestation of how magnets are structured and applied based on the local context (e.g., race, racism, segregated housing, racial community discord). Two explanatory frameworks, in particular, are useful to better understanding how the design and implementation of choice systems are a manifestation of the issues surrounding race and geography that play out between Black and white families.

These critical explanatory frameworks help explain the local context and decisions made by school districts related to school equity concerns. Therefore, the roles that both race and geography play in the enactment of magnet reform are highlighted through Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn, Ladson-Billings, 2013) and Critical Space Perspective (CSP) (Soja, 2010). CRT places race front and center within the equity debate in public education for Black families. CRT also provides the necessary language and framework to better understand the reasons behind segregated schools. This framework also provides a critique on how educational reforms such as schools of choice and magnet programs, continue to prioritize and benefit the interests of white families over families of color. These racial conflicts also manifest within the geography of a community as white families choose where to live and where to send their children to school. Based on this intersection of race and geography, Critical Space Perspective offers a meaningful framework to think about space as both a physical location and a social construction. This socially constructed

space when applied to this case study provides a deeper understanding of a community as they struggle over race, racism, geography, and desegregation of their schools.

Critical Race Theory: The Role of Race in Educational Choice

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a useful explanatory/analytic framework to better understand the central role that race plays within choice systems at the local level. Because of the racial housing discrimination against Black families and the geographic locations of schools within segregated neighborhoods, the majority of public schools remained segregated (Rothstein, 2017). White families were accustomed to having their neighborhood schools be a majority white, and from the 1960s to the present the battle over desegregating schools was no easy concession for the white community. Therefore, school districts began to cater to white educational interests such as magnet programs, to try and convince white parents to enroll their children in schools outside of their racially homogenous neighborhoods (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This catering to white interests in regard to magnet programming in an effort to desegregate schools was problematic for Black students as their educational needs and wants were only granted if they coincided with white interests (Bell, 2004). It is this ongoing racialized conflict of educational interests that is further explored, using CRT as a lens to make sense of the way schools have structured their choice programs to benefit white families.

Critical Race Theory. When addressing historical, social, political, economic, and educational discrimination, CRT provides an explanatory and analytic framework to understand the ramifications of this discrimination against specific racial groups. CRT was developed and advanced by a group of legal scholars: Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier and Kimberle Crenshaw and is considered a sub-division within the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) field. These legal scholars sought to better understand why inequalities persisted

after landmark court decisions and Civil Rights legislation took place in the 1950s and 1960s. One explanation of the continued inequalities became a major tenant of CRT. Particularly, that race, racism, and colonialism were and are central and endemic within American society (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT scholarship then focuses on the examination of ways in which American society's acceptance of racism as ordinary are ingrained within U.S. institutions including public education.

Another major tenant of CRT is that of interest convergence. Interest convergence theorizes that Black social and economic progress only occurs in the U.S. because white interests are equally served in some manner (Bell, 2004). For example, Bell (1992) a major founder of CRT, argued that white America had self-serving interests when meeting the demands brought upon by the Civil Rights Movement, such as trying to improve the American image overseas as they battled the spread of communism. Another example includes allowing some Black students to enter into all white schools as self-serving, as more money flowed into the schools through the increased enrollment of Black children (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bell (2004) developed and pioneered this explanatory framework to better address the reasons why inequity persisted and why discrimination could not solely be legally unwoven.

Continued inequalities, particularly for Black families, played out in the fight over access to education with regard to public schooling. Bell (2004), Ladson-Billings (2013) and Orfield (1997) argued that despite *Brown v Board of Education* that ended legal (de jure) racial segregation in schools, the work of desegregation during the 1950s and 1960s have mostly been reversed based on legal precedents ruled after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Today public schools in U.S. cities continue to remain mostly separate (de facto) and unequal (Dixson & Lynn, 2013). Legal decisions such as denying busing plans to suburban schools from urban districts

(Milliken v. Bradley, 1974), the increase in use of controlled choice programs, as well as housing discrimination have inhibited desegregation efforts (Orfield, 2013). Further, notions of meritocracy and the belief in a post racial society with race neutral policies have only served to perpetuate the inequalities that persist between whites and other racial groups (Tyson, 2013).

The explanations for the persistent disparities in Black children's experience in public schools, by way of CRT, was described by Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) at the American Educational Research Association in their article *Toward a Critical Race Theory in Education.* Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that "critical theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 49) within public education. This radical critique stems from their recognition that both gender based and class-based understandings of inequity do not account for all the differences between a white majority and the non-white minority. Therefore, race must be placed back into the center of educational research as research and writings over the years have "naturalized whiteness" and "oversimplified race" (Roediger, 1999, p.15).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also argue that race as a social construct or as an objective label does not clearly or accurately show the impact of a racialized society for people of color. Race matters and continues to be a central and relevant factor when looking at inequity in the United States. In addition, race not only matters, it is endemic within American culture and life. Race is "deeply ingrained" within the legal precedents and court dealings, within the culture sponsored by industry and institutions, and even psychologically on people of color living within the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). However, this view of race being central to research is not widely accepted in education (Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Tyson, 2013) and not analyzed critically in choice systems. Race within choice systems is a category and racially

balancing schools in terms of demographics is the goal of most choice systems. However, large school districts' efforts to retain white families from leaving and to try and entice white families who have left to come back, places race front and center. Who benefits from policies and programs that are geared towards white interests? This is a question that must be asked when looking at educational reform and equity issues within controlled choice systems. A win-win scenario where Black interests for desegregated schools is achieved by focusing on white interests through magnet programs and educational options, must be deeply interrogated and critiqued.

Interest Convergence. The question of who benefits from U.S. school institutions is of primary concern within CRT and is aligned with Bell's (2004) principle of interest convergence. This principle argues "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 35). One historical example of this principle applied to desegregation and magnet schooling occurred in Buffalo, New York (Lomotey & Staley, 1990). Buffalo, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, applied for and received millions of dollars to reform and overhaul schools to meet a court ordered desegregation plan which required mandatory busing. The addition of magnet programs within the Buffalo school district was used to prevent further white flight, re-attract white families who fled to private schools, and convince other white families to bus their children into neighborhoods that were a majority Black. In all three accounts, Buffalo was successful. That was until the money ran out that funded the magnet programs. After the magnet programs ended, the schools within the city resegregated once again. One intriguing conclusion, however, based on Buffalo's magnet program was that by offering additional curricular sources, a school district could change the mind of a white parent in enrolling their child in a Black majority school. It did not matter to

most school districts across the country that even with the magnet programs in place, Buffalo poorly served Black and Brown children as dropout rates increased and academic gains and performances were stagnant (1990). Instead, the focus was solely placed on the huge success that magnet programs had in changing the minds of white families to attend schools outside of their predominantly white neighborhoods.

Ladson-Billings (1995) in her analysis of Buffalo questioned why magnet programs were deemed a success in desegregating schools when Black student achievement continued to suffer. In her analysis, Buffalo's magnet schools became a model across the country for their ability to create value that benefitted white families and not because of improving Black students' experiences and outcomes in public schools. These magnet programs also were popular because they created white support for desegregation programs due to the benefits they received from the enhanced programming and additional funds. Buffalo's ability, during the 1970s and 1980s, to get white parents to support a desegregation plan with mandatory busing was evidence enough for other districts to also adopt magnet programming (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The question of whether or not these magnet programs benefited Black and Brown students was not as important as seeing white families overcome their prejudices and choosing to integrate.

In a New York Times article on May 13, 1985, entitled, *School Integration in Buffalo is Hailed as a Model for the U.S.*, a story is shared about the power of magnet schooling when it comes to influencing white families.

> For the longest time, Mrs. Holz said, she had prayed to St. Jude – the Roman Catholic patron saint of impossible causes – asking that her children never be bused out of their Irish working-class neighborhood. She and her husband, Dick, went to hundreds of meetings and promised trouble if their children were bused into black inner-city and East

> Side neighborhoods. And then one day several years ago, she said, one of her sons came home and told her about a new magnet school he wanted to attend. "It was devastating," Mrs. Holz said. "Here I was opposing busing, because I was trying to do what's best for my kids, and they were telling me something different." In time, she said she was willing to give the magnet schools a try…The day she broke the news to her husband, a steelworker, sitting right in the room with them, giving moral support, was the associate superintendent of schools, Joseph Murray. "Dick said, 'We'll try it, but if one thing happens to my kids…' " Mrs. Holz recalled. Mr. Murray knew how important this little husband-wife talk was for Buffalo. "Carol Holz was a big win," he said. Mrs. Holz's son went from an all-white neighborhood school in South Buffalo with 30 in a class to an integrated inner-city magnet school with 18 in a class. "He was getting hot lunches," she said. "We never had that in South Buffalo. There were brand-new books and materials – and a library you wouldn't believe."

This excerpt from the New York Times (1985) provides a compelling narrative that supports Ladson-Billings argument that white families were willing to consider equality for Black families when their interests were prioritized and served first. Carol and Dick Holz were adamantly against integration even to the point of promising trouble if their children were bused to the "inner-city." However, when their own children showed interest in the magnet program, the lower class sizes, hot lunches, and new books and materials, Carol and Dick's tune changed. However, this display and coddling of white dominance in the form of trying to appease white interests did not benefit Black children in the long run (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lomotey & Staley, 1990).

While Buffalo's use of magnet programs increased the white student enrollment in

schools with Black majorities, once the funding for the programs and services ended many of the magnet schools reverted back to being segregated as white families left the schools behind (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000). However, Black families did not have the resources to leave Buffalo's school system once the funding ran out and the schools have segregated once again and have returned to its prior state of low test scores and achievement. So, who benefited most and whose interests were best served through the adoption of the magnet program in Buffalo? The debate around whether school of choice through magnet programs enhances equality or deepens inequality continues to be waged within public education and local communities (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). In Buffalo, however, the results were clear. When white educational interests were attended to, desegregation occurred; however, in the long run when those same benefits disappeared, so did the white student population from schools located in predominantly Black neighborhoods (Ayscue, Siegel-Hawley, Woodward, & Orfield, 2016).

Over the past few decades, these Buffalo magnet programs eventually switched over to become criteria based schools with admission processes that required testing. These testing requirements advantaged white students over Black students and the criteria based schools in Buffalo had a much higher percentages of white students when compared to non-criteria based schools in the same district. These schools, which required students to test and apply into, became the new beacon for white student enrollment. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education, New York Office for Civil Rights responded to complaints filed by Black parents alleging that the school district's criteria based schools (e.g., gifted and talented program, performing arts, city honors, Da Vinci) discriminated against students of color through their admission process. The enrollment figures presented a lopsided acceptance rate of white students in Buffalo's criterion schools compared to non-criterion schools. The acceptance rate of white

students also was higher than the percentage that applied to the school in a given year. These schools once a beacon for integration of segregated schools now have become, in Buffalo, segregated once more as students of color are discriminated against in the admission and testing process.

When looking at the literature, the overwhelming benefits that magnet programs provide (Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009) must be understood within a critical context of who benefits the most from these programs in the short and long term. In addition, caution when using and applying for magnet programming is warranted due to the diverse options available in different school of choice systems (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). The outcomes of magnet programs vary depending on how the magnet is structured and used within a school district and community. This variation in outcomes also occurs because different school districts and communities have different purposes and needs in adopting a magnet program. It also matters whether or not a magnet program is set up as an inter-district or intra-district program. An inter-district program would allow families to enroll in magnet schools and cross school district lines to do it. An intra-district magnet program would try and recruit parents from the same community to attend a school that is outside their immediate neighborhood. Usually intra-district magnet programs try and recruit white families to leave their segregated neighborhood zones and cross into predominantly Black neighborhood schools (Siegel-Hawley, 2013; Richards, 2014; Richards & Stroub, 2015).

Critical Spatial Perspective

Buffalo, New York provided an example of desegregation through the implementation of magnet schools. The following is a demographic map of the City of Buffalo, which clearly shows the racial segregation within the city.

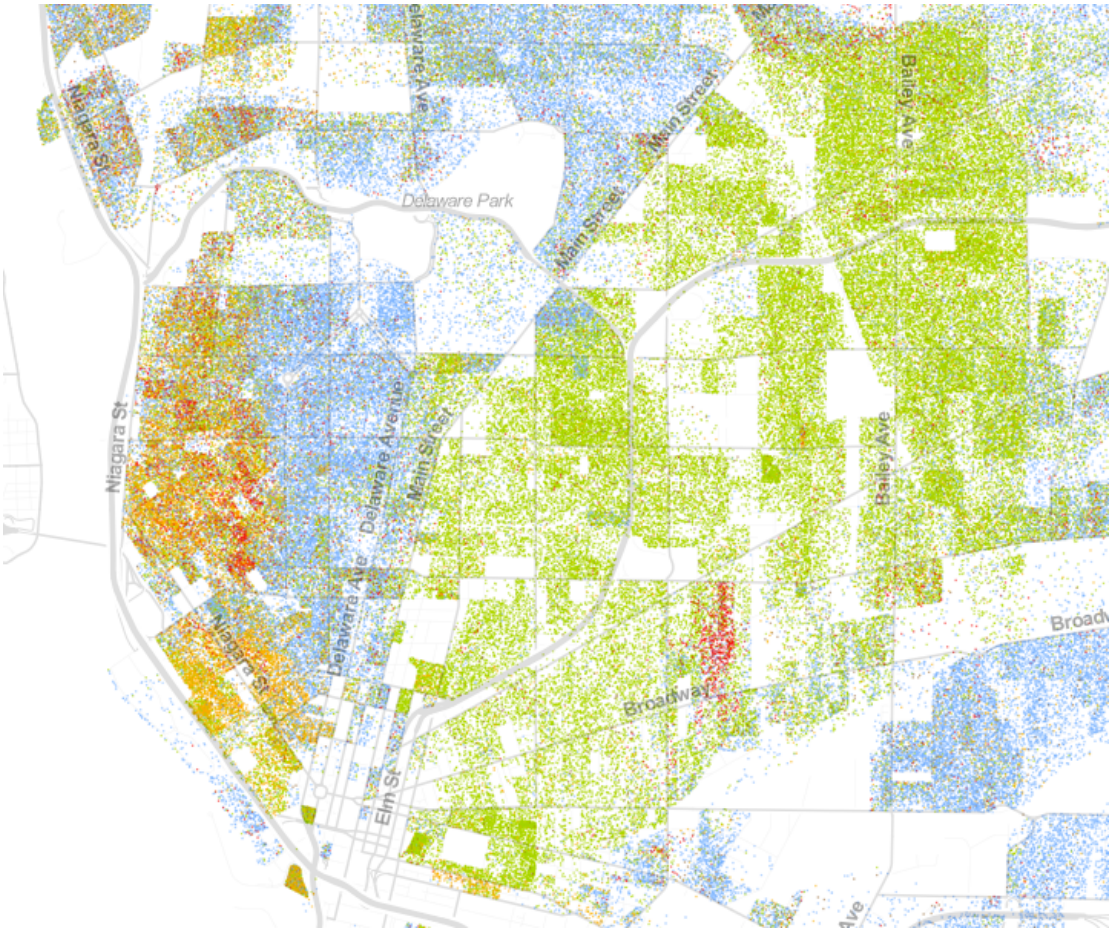

Figure 1. A demographic map of Buffalo, New York with 2010 Census data. This map shows the segregation in Buffalo where green dots represent the Black population, blue dots represent the white population, red dots represent the Asian population, and orange dots represent the Hispanic population. Reprinted from The Racial Dot Map, D. Cable, 2013, Retrieved from http://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map/

The blue dots represent the white population and the green dots represent the Black population and the separation between Black and white families can be clearly seen. Due to Buffalo's school of choice policy, depending on where the geographic location of the school is, the student demographic skewed towards the neighborhood racial makeup (Ayscue, Siegel-Hawley, Woodward, & Orfield, 2016). Understanding the geography of a community in terms of racial segregation, and the location of school buildings within that geography are crucial in

understanding the lure of magnet programs. Parents are reluctant to send their children outside their segregated neighborhoods (2016). The reasons behind this reluctance were explained through principles of CRT and CSP. While interest convergence and race play a central role within the pursuit of equal schooling, so does the geographic location of a school within a segregated community. Critical Spatial Perspective (Soja, 2010) then, offers a useful framework in better understanding the consequences that both physical and socially constructed spaces[14] have on the everyday life of a child within the community (e.g., education system).

Spatial Awareness. The intersection of race and geographical space within educational choice systems provides a framework in better understanding how Black students benefit from and respond to magnet programs within the schools. CRT, within education, places race at the forefront in explaining the continued problems with educational choice that a community faces when having to appease both Black and white community interests. CSP further adds new insights by introducing how the geographic location of schools within racialized communities helps better explain the local context and decision-making regarding magnet adoption. Having spatial awareness then means understanding the geographic consequences of a specific school location and also understanding that space is socially and collectively produced. In other words, school locations in the community (geography) have consequences for what happens within that school including student population demographics, curricular focuses, as well as other forces (e.g., social, political, racial) that all converge within the lived school space (Soja, 2010).

From Soja's (2010) perspective, seeing geography only in its material, physical, or cartographic form is not the only way to interpret space. Rather, Soja argues for geography to be understood as a lived space that is socially and collectively produced. In this understanding of

[14] Space and geography are used interchangeably within the text

geography representing lived space, is where the term spatial justice comes from. For Soja, spatial justice focuses on "the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice" (p. 30). For example, in a city space, looking at spatial justice would mean examining whether or not there is a fair and equal distribution of "socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them" throughout the city space (p. 31). Soja further states that geographies as lived spaces already have different forms of justice and injustice built within them. When it came to justice, there is "always a relevant spatial dimension" (p. 32). For example, because housing segregation is built into a city due to racial discrimination, addressing issues of justice would mean having to attend to the relevant spatial dimension of segregated housing.

Also, within these lived spaces, there exists a socio-spatial dialectic (Soja, 2010). This dialectic refers to the way that the spatial realities shape the social environment as much as the social environment shapes the spatial realities. To be a human (spatial being) means to struggle over geographical space. People continue to try and shape their environments while the environment is simultaneously shaping them. As Soja writes, humans are "always existing socially and individually trying to shape our environment and at the same time our environment is trying to shape us, it is a two way street" (p. 45). The most common focus on spatial awareness is better understanding how social forces shape geography. For example, how does capitalism or racism shape different geographic environments? Yet, the move to also understand how lived spaces (environment) shape how one relates with others around him or her is equally important. Soja calls for a more sophisticated examination into the ways that spaces shape or produce human actions and relationships.

Consequential Geography. Practically speaking, this socio-spatial relationship means that the geographies or lived spaces can have negative and/or positive consequences on everyday

life. As Soja (2010) notes, through a Foucauldian (1968) understanding that the geographical consequences based on the intersection of power, space, and knowledge could be simultaneously enabling and oppressive. In this case study, this Foucauldian understanding plays out within the north end of Prairie. This historic part of town emerged due to racial segregation within the city boundaries. Yet, while housing discrimination and segregation shaped the north end, the north end as a lived space equally shaped the fight for fair education within the community as seen through the work of the Black north end activists. The north end was created out of oppression, but then in turn also promoted Black activism within the community. If these geographical spaces are socially designed, produced, and advantaged for one race over another, then these same spaces can also be changed and organized differently to provide greater equality for people who have been historically marginalized in this space. In order to organize geography (lived spaces) more equitably requires a deeper understanding of the consequences of geography and race.

Soja (2010) also describes the notion that "justice, however it might be defined, has a consequential geography" (p. 1). This "consequential geography" is then "a spatial expression that is more than just a background reflection or a set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped" (p. 1). For example, racial lines of division within a community have consequences that not only dictate where people can live but also where they can attend schools. Thus, the struggle over geography seen through spatial injustice is both an outcome and a process. The outcome of segregated housing is segregated schooling, yet there are also processes involved in creating a segregated community (i.e., real estate practices, banking practices, home evaluation practices, local discrimination practices). Discrimination based on a school's location within a segregated community, is then a consequence of geography that is socially designed and produced. In this

case study, the bias imposed on north end schools that continually failed to attract white families were based on the biases against Black families who lived in the north end (geographical location). These school biases located in predominantly Black areas of town by white families continued to produce spatial injustice by organizing spatial structures that privilege and advance white interests over Black interests (see chapter four). Socially constructed space, such as local schools, can thus either empower or disempower students and families and plays out within the daily structures and processes within local school districts. Orfield (2013) writes,

> Not all choice mechanisms are good. Some may cause additional harm. Depending on the nature of the choice offered and the validity of the assumptions on which it rests, something may sound good but turn out to be deeply disappointing, or what looks like a simple pathway to opportunity may turn out to be a complex path with many turns and dangers" (p. 80).

The consequences of lived spaces play an important role in equity discussions revolving around the usefulness of magnet programs in choice systems. These geographic consequences must also be taken into consideration when trying to promote a more equitable schooling system for Black students who have faced historical discrimination within schooling.

Unrepresented Voices and Student Agency

The ways in which discrimination persisted for Black students in magnet schools when looking at the intersection of race, geography, and school of choice practices must include Black student voices and Black lived experiences within the school setting. Black voices and experiences are important because the major narrative in magnet programming is whether or not the program is successful in increasing student achievement and decreasing segregation. The personal experiences and stories from Black students that magnet programs claim they serve,

continue to be underemphasized when compared to quantitative data regarding the success of a magnet program. This majoritarian narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) supplied by school districts emphasize all the academic and desegregation benefits that a magnet program will bring to the school instead of planning in detail how to provide better educational opportunities for Black students in particular. In most cases, the majoritarian narrative is based on privilege and does not give the appropriate attention to the continued ways in which Black students are subordinated within the school setting.

As Solórzano and Yosso (2016) state from a critical race perspective, "...educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 129). To tell whether or not the institution is oppressive or empowering must be told from the Black students' perspective in order to see the different ways that magnet programs are beneficial or detrimental to Black children. CRT stresses that the Black students' experiences and voices are legitimate, appropriate, and necessary to examine and address issues of inequity within school environments (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Furthermore, how Black students' exercise or demonstrate their agency is important to this discussion because Black students who attend public schools are not powerless. Thus, the focus of my investigation and study is based on the Black participants' experiences as they engage in STEM activities as sources of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017) that show the benefits and/or harm that magnet services have on their learning, especially since those services are structured by the school district to benefit white interests and demands (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Whether in the form of resistance or some other response, Black students have the human capacity to act, to be recognized, and to matter (Ortner, 2006). Even in institutions like public schools that have a long history of discrimination towards Black

children (Robinson, 2000; Kozol, 2012; Rothstein, 2013).

Implications of Race and Space on Choice

Critical race researchers, critical space researchers, and researchers who study educational choice understand that educational institutions can help and/or hurt students and their communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016; Soja, 2010; Orfield, 2013). Critical race scholars (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016; Bell, 2004, Ladson-Billings, 2013) admit that schools operate in contrary ways. Schools have the potential to oppress and marginalize which co-exist with a school's potential to free and empower. Soja (2010), a critical space researcher, describes this same duality of schools by stating that because space is socially designed and produced, school spaces have the potential to either empower or disempower depending on how that space is organized. Orfield (2013) describes the potential and pitfalls of choice systems in the same way. Either choice systems can improve equity issues in a school or can cause more harm depending on the assumptions that are used in creating the choice system and based on the local decisions and context. The ways in which race, geography, and choice systems help or hurt students who have been historically marginalized is important within the field of education and within American society.

Therefore, the intersection of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Spatial Perspective (CSP) provided the necessary framework to better understand and make sense of the racial and geographic realities that converged at Robert Smalls. By better understanding Robert Smalls' racial (CRT) and geographic (CSP) context, a sharper lens can be applied to analyze the ways that racism against schools located in Black majority areas (CSP) and the continued dominance of white interests within school districts (CRT) had palpable consequences for Black students' experiences within north end schools.

One way in which the district sought to neutralize these white racialized biases against Black north end schools was to try and attract white families into these same schools by implementing programs that benefited their curricular and racial interests. Magnet services catered to white curricular interests and the gifted programming catered to white interests in keeping their children separated from the Black majority within the schools. This local context, in which the school district made programmatic decisions based on the struggle over racism and geography mattered because as Blank, Levine, and Steel (1996) noted, only with a deep understanding and analysis of the local context can conclusions be drawn about the benefits of a magnet program for students of color.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

> *Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. Carrying out such research involves…two interconnected activities: Firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world that draw upon such participation. (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 1)*

Why This Case?

This case study employs ethnographic field research in order to better understand the lived experiences of Black children at Robert Smalls STEM Academy. Robert Smalls, and the students' experiences within, is significant due to its adoption of a STEM magnet as a way to desegregate the Black student majority. The school district's goal for Robert Smalls was to change the public reputation of the school by promoting a curricular program that catered to white families' educational interests. The desegregation goals of the school along with the city of Prairie's segregated past, and the historical racial and geographic prejudice against north end schools by white residents, provided an ideal school site to study. At Robert Smalls' school site, this case study explores the experiences of Black students as they engaged in a STEM magnet program designed to attract white residents from outside the surrounding neighborhood. Furthermore, how Prairie school district responded to these racial and geographic biases is still relevant today as public schools are rapidly resegregating at an alarming rate (Frankenberg, 2013; Orfield, 2013; Richards, 2014). Within Prairie school district, the local context and history add the necessary context in order to better understand the lived experiences of the focal participants in this study.

Because the everyday interactions within a school setting act as a microcosm of the larger structures and systems within the local and national context, I "immersed" myself into the world of the focal participants "in order to grasp what they experienced as meaningful and important" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 2). Through this immersion as a participant observer, collecting of data (e.g., human experiences), and writing of systematic fieldnotes, I began to piece together a slice of the collective experiences of the participants in this study. I focused particularly on narratives that are under told when implementing a magnet program intended to promote equity for Black children. These narratives provide a different view than the district's dominant, white majority perspective, which usually focuses on presenting the best possible case for how they addressed racial inequity. After all, Prairie school district must prove that they are committed to racial equality in order to avoid future discrimination lawsuits and also prove that the millions given in federal magnet grants were not wasted. These conflicting priorities seen between the narratives of the Black participants and the district's majoritarian view are problematized and framed in this study through the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do local decisions and context shape magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district?
    a. What role does race and geography play in the local decisions and context regarding magnet reform?
2. How do Black students experience learning opportunities related to the magnet reform efforts in a small urban school district?
    a. How do Black students exercise or demonstrate agency (i.e. human capacity to act) as they interact with their teachers and peers in a magnet based school?

The listed research questions focus on the backdrop of Prairie by analyzing the intersection of race and geography within the community and the consequences within the school site. In addition, the focus on the participants' classroom experiences and events provide a meaningful lens into the larger structures and systems at work within Robert Smalls and the school district. The next section focuses on the rationale for using qualitative methods, description and significance of the school site, community and the main participants.

Rationale for Case Study

Educational research has historically used qualitative methods, especially when the focus of the research involves exploring larger, more abstract phenomena. If possible, qualitative researchers enter the social worlds of their participants to gain insight into how one or more cases illustrate a specific phenomenon of interest (Dyson, 2005). A case is defined and bound by its social unit, and is an instantiation of the phenomenon of interest. A social unit can be a person, a socially connected group of students, or a place or activity in which a person or group of people interact with one another (Stake, 1995). Within a case, the "messy complexity of human experiences" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3) can be explored in order to find meaning from the "multiple truths in other's lives" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 2011, p. 2).

My phenomenon of interest focuses on Black students' participation and social actions within STEM programming initiated by a school district to achieve racial desegregation and address educational equity issues. Case study methodology is appropriate in approaching this phenomenon of interest because I am interested in the multiple truths of Black students' lived experiences as their participation intersects with institutional goals such as the implementation of desegregation and the improvement of Black student educational outcomes. The case for this phenomenon of interest is the STEM program at Robert Smalls elementary school, which was

implemented through applying for and winning a federal magnet grant designed to promote racial desegregation and reduce educational inequality. The STEM program case allows for a deeper examination into the multiple experiences of Black children's participation in a program supposedly designed for their benefit.

In addition to defining the case, the social unit is comprised of four Black participants that were socially connected through their shared classroom space and involvement in STEM activities. The participants' experiences provided a window through which the researcher may gain their perspective as they engaged with the STEM projects and also as they interacted with their teachers and their peers. Their experiences cannot be fully captured through quantitative means; therefore using case study methodology is beneficial in observing the multiple experiences (e.g., student-teacher interaction, peer interaction, engagement in STEM curriculum) of Black students' lives from within their social worlds. Entering into the student's world, building relationships with them, and keeping systematic notes based on observations and dialogue during the fieldwork is essential to qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Participant observations helped paint a fuller, more nuanced picture.

Erickson (1986) notes that while educational researchers approach new sites with general questions or interests, qualitative research attempts to categorize different particularities and groups them together in order to better understand the phenomenon of interest. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that "you are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 5). These parts are the "fine details of behavior and meaning in everyday social interaction with analysis of the wider societal context within which the face-to-face interaction takes place" (Erickson, 1986, p. 120). The larger societal context is given partly in the general description of

the site in this chapter, but explained in much more detail in chapter four. Given this wider context, the "fine details" that Erickson mentioned is found within my field note observations, analytic memos, and interview transcriptions and documents. In chapters five and six, I analyze the fine details of behaviors within the wider societal context to make meaning of the daily realities for Black children at small urban schools that undergo magnet programming designed for desegregation.

Research Site

Community. Robert Smalls elementary school is located in Prairie, a small Midwestern urban city. The population of Prairie city is roughly 85,000, as noted by the Census Bureau in 2015. Also in 2015, Prairie's racial demographic was 67.8% white, 15.6% Black, 10.6% Asian, and 6.3% Hispanic or Latinx. Historically, Prairie also enacted and maintained segregated neighborhoods. Black families were limited to homes in the northeast part of town while the majority of white families occupied the south and later northwest parts of town (see figure 2 below).

In 1961, a local newspaper, based on data from the League of Women Voters, stated that Prairie and its adjoining twin city was "the most segregated community of the 15 largest cities in the state." In this same article, when the League of Women Voters canvased 128 apartment owners within Prairie, an overwhelming 97.6% refused to rent to Black renters. Real estate agents also did not represent Black families if they wanted to live outside the designated northeast area and actively attempted to keep specific neighborhoods all white. For example, if a Black family owned a home outside of the northeast area, when they eventually tried to sell that home, realtors would look for white buyers on purpose in order to re-segregate neighborhoods (local newspaper). Even if Black families could find a realtor to help them buy a home outside of

the designated northeast area, local banks at that time would not give a loan to Black buyers unless they purchased within the segregated boundaries. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and additional laws created to prevent discrimination in many sectors of life, including housing and banking, discriminatory practices were eventually outlawed. Yet, the ramification of discrimination within the housing market was still prevalent at the time of this study.

When thinking about the segregated northeast end of Prairie, Figure 2 below, shows a purple demarcation line that represented a road that had traditionally separated the Black north end from the white south end of town.

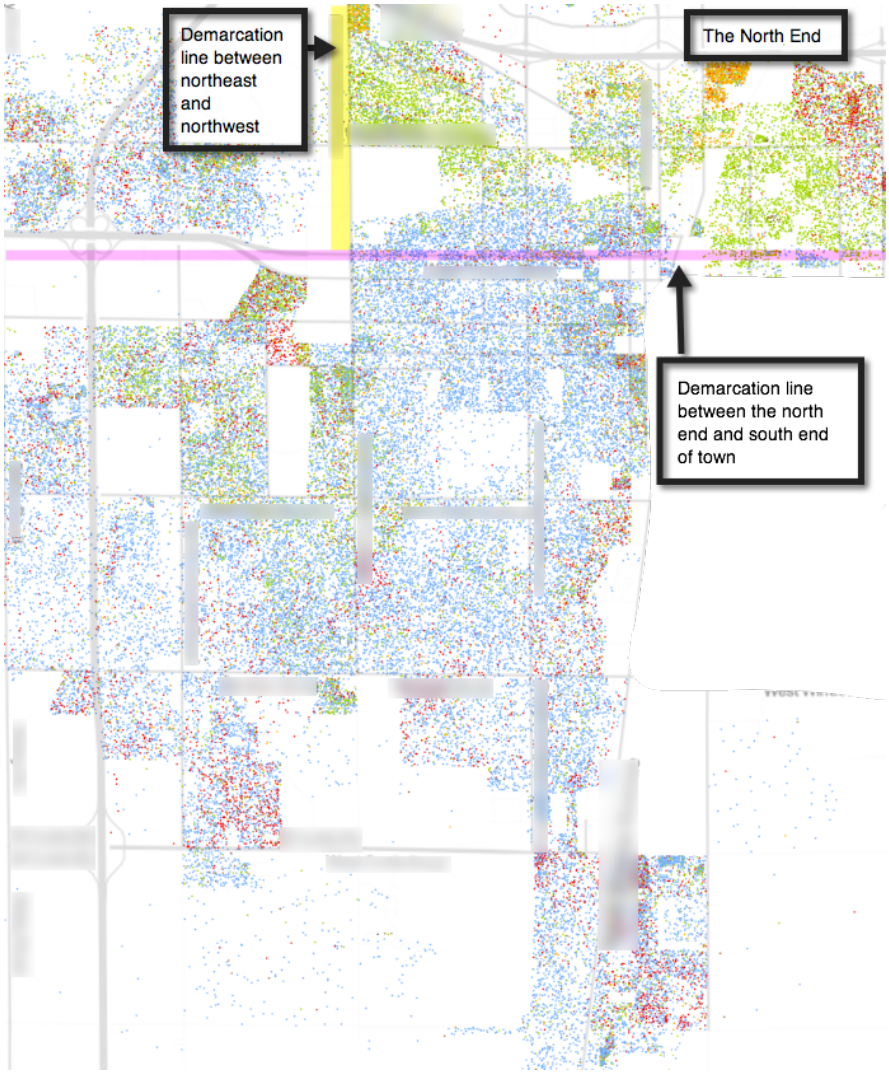

Figure 2. A demographic map of Prairie with 2010 Census data. This map shows the segregation in Prairie where green dots represent the Black population, blue dots represent the white population, red dots represent the Asian population, and orange dots represent the Hispanic population. Reprinted from The Racial Dot Map, D. Cable, 2013, Retrieved from http://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map/

The northeast end, in Figure 2, represented what people in the community traditionally referred to as the "historic north end[15]." This map is based on 2010 U.S. Census Data, which shows the

[15] Note the distinction between the north end and the northeast and northwest end. In this study, the use of the term "north end" refers to the Black historic northeast portion of Prairie. When a distinction is made between the northeast and northwest portion of town, it is to differentiate between the historic Black northeast end and the newer subdivisions built in the northwest portion of town is majority white and Asian.

continued racial divide within the city between mainly Black and white residents[16]. This divide continued long after housing discrimination was outlawed in 1968. In addition, when referring to the north end, two distinctions are required in order to better understand the issues surrounding race, geography, and school locations.

The first distinction is that the northeast segregated portion of Prairie has a much longer history of existing than the newer housing subdivisions that have taken over the northwest area. In Figure 2 above, the northeast end of Prairie is separated from the northwest end by a yellow demarcation line. When considering the traditional racial divide between the north and south end, the northwest area should not be considered a part of the historic Black north end. These housing subdivisions were built in more recent times (2003) and boasted single-family homes with no affordable housing available. In chapter four, the distinction between the Black north end and the white northwest end is highlighted as Black activists battled the school district regarding where a new north end school should be built (northeast or northwest part of town).

School District. Prairie can be described as an urban characteristic school district. As Milner (2012) explains, urban characteristic "describes schools that are not located in big or mid-sized cities but may be starting to experience some of the challenges that are sometimes associated with urban school contexts" (p. 559). These challenges in Prairie deal with the segregated housing, racism, and unequal community services for Black families including public education. In 2015, Prairie school district served 9,948 students and had seventeen schools comprising of twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools that were

[16] Asian and Latinx populations were smaller populations at the time of this study and while still represented on the map, were not discussed in detail, because they did not have a central role in this study.

spread out within the city limits. Figure 3 below shows the twelve elementary schools' geographic locations within the city.

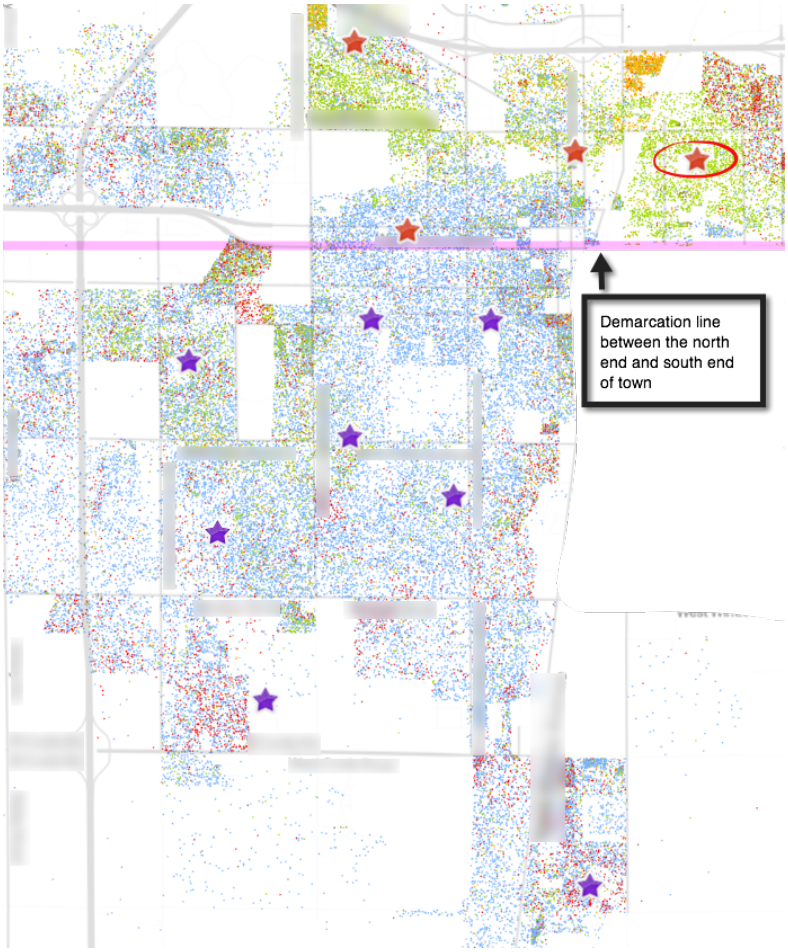

Figure 3. The location of the twelve elementary schools in Prairie school district. Purple stars represent elementary schools located in the south end of town and the orange stars represent the north end elementary schools. Robert Smalls is circled.

Three out of the four elementary schools in Figure 3, represented by orange stars, were located in the north end. The geographical locations of Robert Smalls and the two other schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods, posed challenges for the school district as white families on the south end did not want to send their children to north end schools (see chapter four). This lack of interest in white families to attend north end schools had serious implications within the school district. As reported in the local newspapers, starting in the 1920s, school closures

happened more on the north end of town and new school buildings were built more on the south end of town. When looking at which schools to close, it made more economic sense to close the schools that were the oldest or the buildings in need of the most repair. These buildings were predominantly on the north end because the district historically underfunded them. These north end school closings left an inadequate number of seats to support the Black student population that resided there, as confirmed by an analysis completed on seat capacity by the district[17].

Instead of rebuilding more schools in the north end, Black students were mandatorily bused to schools within the south end of Prairie city from the 1970s through the 1990s. For the school district, it was a win-win scenario in addressing the lack of seats available on the north end without having to build more schools there. Also, there was an added benefit of desegregating white majority schools in the south end of town. This mandatory busing of 550 Black students was met with an official complaint to the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights in 1996. The complaint, filed by Black families, claimed that one way busing of Black children to schools on the south end of town created an undue burden on Black families. The one way busing also disadvantaged Black students as needed educational services were not offered in the schools located in the south end. In 1997, the school district entered into an agreement stipulating a controlled choice plan[18] meant to address unequal student assignment in schools across the district. This plan initially gained Black support because it was intended to provide a more structured and systemized approach to school assignment within the district, and

[17] This seat capacity analysis was done in conjunction with the consent decree.
[18] Controlled choice plan has every parent/guardian in the district apply for the schools they want by listing them in order based on preference. Then in Prairie, a computer program disseminates the data and assigns students based on a myriad of factors: income level, parent education level, proximity to school, siblings, etc.

hopefully alleviate the unfair busing burden on Black children. However, the problems of segregated schools remained, despite efforts to integrate through busing.

Even after adopting the controlled choice plan in 1997, schools remained segregated and in the year 2000, another Black family sued the district based on racial discrimination seen in segregated schools, graduation rates, special education placement, academic scores, and discipline data. The lawsuit claimed that Prairie's entire education system was complicit (Office of Civil Rights Complaint, 1995). In settling this lawsuit, Prairie voluntarily entered into a court-monitored consent decree, in which they had to reduce these racial disparities and show proof of their progress to a federal judge. The consent decree and the controlled choice plan, which eliminated the guarantee of attending a school in your neighborhood, were not well received by the white residents in Prairie. The choice plan also did little to assuage white flight to neighboring communities that were still majority white or to the eleven private schools within Prairie city. Table 1 below, shows the result of white flight in Prairie. The percentage of white residents within the city was at 68%, which was much higher than the white student percentage in Prairie school district, which was only at 39%.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background of Prairie Compared to the School District's Overall Student Population (2015)[19]

Racial/Ethnic Background	Prairie	School District[20]
White	67.8%	39%
Black	15.6%	34%
Asian	10.6%	10%
Latinx	6.3%	10%

[19] Data gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau

[20] The remaining 7% of students had a racial/ethnic background of two or more races and were left out of the table because no distinction of which two races were described in the source.

Coupled with white flight to neighboring communities and/or private schools, the racial demographic of Prairie school district had significantly changed over the last two decades. In 1996-1997, 62% of the student body was white, in 2004-2005 only 50% of the student body was white, and in 2007-2008 the white student population continued to decrease to 45% of the entire student body[21] (State School Report Card, 2015). In 2015, the year of this study, white students comprised only 39% of the overall student body as seen in Table 1. The city of Prairie also had, in 2015, eleven private and parochial schools within the city limits available for parents who did not enroll their children in public schools and who could afford the tuition. Further, Prairie's surrounding communities still had a majority white student population (>90%) in their schools and had experienced growth due to white flight out of Prairie city. For the school district, this meant that white student enrollment continued to decrease.

Therefore, the school district faced a quandary in trying to balance racial equity mandates with often-conflicting concerns raised by white families who had the resources to leave the school district for other educational choices. In order to attract and keep white families within the district and also maintain the ability to desegregate north end schools, Prairie sought to provide a market-oriented solution that would increase the demand for schools in the north end. Even the federal judge who oversaw the consent decree stated that the use of gifted services was an effective method of keeping white families from fleeing the district and perhaps could entice white families who left to come back. In addition to the gifted services in the north end, the district won a multi-million dollar grant from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) in order to desegregate schools like Robert Smalls by implementing specialized curricular

[21] Data retrieved from Prairie's school district demographic study conducted in 2008 and the Educational Equity Audit conducted in 1998 for the school district and presented during the US OCR complaint.

programs. Yet, in 2015, four years after the implementation of magnet programs, Schools 1 through 4 in Table 2 below were all in the north end and still had the highest Black student percentages when compared to Schools 5 through 9 which are all located in the south end of Prairie. The market-oriented programs did little to change the geographic biases based on race that white families had with north end schools.

Table 2

2015 Black Student Percentage Ranked from Highest to Lowest

Elementary Schools	Enrollment	Black Percentage	White Percentage
North End	470	56.7	15.3
Robert Smalls	365	52.1	25.2
North End	416	43.5	26.2
North End	548	43.4	13
South End	357	31.3	45.4
South End	473	26	36.2
South End	472	25.6	46.8
South End	410	24.6	51
South End	294	24.5	59.9
South End	469	23	46.7
Sound End	424	19.6	45.3

School. Robert Smalls was originally built in 1952 in the predominantly Black, north end of Prairie. Due to the purposeful segregation ingrained within housing and schooling within Prairie, Black students historically only attended schools in the north end. For white families who lived in the north end, their children were historically bussed to white majority schools in the south end of town. This segregated schooling was normal and ordinary within the town of Prairie, since the Great Migration until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. After the *Brown*

v. Board of Education decision and President Johnson's executive actions that would have denied funds to schools that purposefully segregated, Prairie school district in 1968, began the process of pre-emptively desegregating the school system. This preemptive desegregation was initiated to avoid the eventual litigation surrounding segregated schooling (local newspaper, 2002).

During this late 1960s period, one of the interventions that Prairie school district tried in collaboration with the local university, was to adopt an arts magnet at Robert Smalls in order to "entice white families to the north end of town" (local newspaper[22], 2011). The local newspaper reported that Robert Smalls was the only school in the district with a full time art teacher and the school was in high demand with many families on the waiting list. Twenty-five percent of the school's student population was reserved for the surrounding Black neighborhood and the other seventy-five percent came from all over the community. The magnet program, opened in the late 1960s, was the model for integration within Prairie as it produced the needed white demand to desegregate Robert Smalls.

While Robert Smalls did initially attract white families for a short time during the 1960s and 1970s, after the magnet program ended, the school resegregated and continued to be predominantly Black and eventually Latinx. Robert Smalls, in more recent times, housed a bilingual program that changed the racial student demographic within the school. In the spring of 2011, the student population at Robert Smalls was 46.8% Latinx. However, in the spring of 2012, a few months after the STEM magnet began in August of 2011 at Robert Smalls, the bilingual program was moved to its own building, which dramatically reduced the Latinx student

[22]Local newspaper refers to the same town paper. There is only one major newspaper within Prairie. The specific newspaper is not named for confidentiality, but the year is listed for perspective.

population. By 2015, the Latinx percentage at Robert Smalls had shrunk to 6.6% of the student body and a steady rise of Black and white student enrollment ensued.

Participants

Within a case, the "messy complexity of human experiences" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3) can be explored in order to find and make meaning from the "truths in other's lives" (Emerson, 2011, p. 2). Ethnographic researchers, therefore, enter the social worlds of their participants in order to gain insight into how one or more cases illustrate a specific phenomenon of interest (Dyson, 2005). In this study, I try to better understand the participants' world as I entered into Robert Smalls. I wanted to systematically record the experiences of Black students in a magnet school designed to desegregate by catering to white interests. Through the lens of the Black participants, I hope to gain insights into the everyday experiences and narratives that are under told within the majoritarian narrative that Prairie school districts offered, which was that magnet programs benefited Black students. These everyday interactions and experiences within Robert Smalls are a microcosm of society's racial, social, and geographic structures/systems embedded within the surrounding community.

In choosing the participants, the perspectives and experiences of Black students were prioritized and non-negotiable because as Ladson Billings (2001) notes, critical race theory lacks praxis in educational practice. Placing the focus, particularly on Black children's experiences helps to better understand and address the persistent nature of educational inequalities that continue to exist for Black students in public school spaces (Carter, 2005/2009; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Delpit, 1995; Kozol, 2005; Rothstein, 2013). Therefore, in this study, the Black student participants' experiences and interactions take central place in better

understanding the lived realities in a school implementing a magnet reform designed to desegregate the student population.

When selecting the participants, I had to make a decision about who to pick that best represented the intent of this study. I chose fifth grade because they engaged the most in STEM related activities when compared to the younger grade levels. I also decided to choose my main participants from the general education classrooms due in large part to the racial breakdown of the classrooms. As can be seen in Table 3 below, a majority of the Black students were in the general education classes compared to the self-contained gifted classroom.

Table 3

Racial Demographic Breakdown at Robert Smalls' Fifth Grade Classrooms (2015)[23]

	Mrs. Canaan General education	Ms. Stuart General education	Mrs. Mohr Gifted
Black students	17	19	5
Females	9	9	2
Males	8	10	3
White students	4	1	11
Females	1	0	5
Males	3	1	6
Asian students	1	0	6
Females	1	0	4
Males	0	0	2
Latino students	0	3	2
Females	0	3	1
Males	0	0	1
Total students	22	21	24

Furthermore, since home to school proximity was a major factor in school assignment, many of the general education students were from the immediate neighborhood in the north end, which

[23] Data from classroom teachers based on their classroom rosters which lists the self-identified race of each child by his or her parents/guardians.

was then corroborated and verified by the teachers. The white students from the self-contained gifted classroom came from outside the historic Black north end, as verified by the classroom teachers. Either they were from the south end of town or the new housing sub divisions in the northwest portion of town. I also chose not to choose a white focal participant from the self-contained gifted classroom because I knew that there were testing requirements to get into the gifted program. Without passing the gifted tests, students had a more difficult time getting into this program unless specifically recommended by a classroom teacher. Furthermore, self-contained gifted was a program placed into only north end schools in order to attract white families by guaranteeing them a self-contained classroom that was separated from the majority Black general education students. The students in the self-contained gifted classroom were also mostly from outside the surrounding neighborhood as verified by the teachers.

From the general education classrooms, when choosing which students would be the main participants, I looked for students who were actively engaged in the magnet related activities. I also looked for students who were vocal in their participation and who could represent well the different types of classroom conversations occurring within the fifth grade. I also attuned to students who had many social relationships with peers in order to capture their interactions with one another. Students that were chosen to be the main participants also had to represent the major racial and gender dimensions of the classroom, which ultimately resulted in choosing two Black males and one Black female from the general education classrooms. The students who met these parameters and allowed me to get to the social center of the classroom were Jada (female, Black), Jacoby (male, Black), and Andrew (male, Black)[24].

[24] Pseudonyms used for both female and male participants

Female Participant. Jada (female, Black) was from Ms. Stuart's general education classroom and also lived in the north end of town. Jada rode the bus to and from the school and also had many friends from the neighborhood in class. She was highly interested and engaged in the STEM activities and wanted an active role in her group when working on these activities. Many times during the group project, Jada tried to engage with her peers and work on different components only to be ignored or sidelined. Her response was not one of defeat, but she continued to work at the project by herself or continued to probe others in her group to accept her ideas. Jada did not accept the roles to which she was assigned by classmates, but instead preceded to work on the different parts of the project herself and verbally confronted her peers who stood in her way.

Male Participants. The two Black male participants were Jacoby and Andrew[25]. Jacoby was from Ms. Stuart's general education classroom and lived in the north end. His name was one that I heard many times as other students called his name, as his friends would come to visit and chat, and as all the teachers knew his name by heart and called it out often in response to what he was doing. Jacoby had a mind and will of his own. He was masterful in hiding a comic book and bringing it out at appropriate times (when the teacher was not looking) while a guest speaker from the local university talked on and on about physics and the universe. Jacoby was also not afraid to speak his mind and argue for his point within the group setting. He would not back down when his ideas were not taken seriously and would also verbally explain his feelings when he felt teachers were treating him unfairly. He was also serious about his involvement and participation in the STEM projects and was not afraid to interject his ideas and thoughts within

[25] Pseudonyms used for both male participants

the group setting. He pressed for his ideas to be accepted by the group and implemented on the project.

Andrew was from Mrs. Canaan's general education classroom, lived in the north end, and was extremely involved in the STEM related projects. During my time there, all Andrew wanted to do was work on the STEM projects. When I asked him what he liked about STEM, he told me that it was different than what they normally did in class. He liked the ideas and the missions and working with his hands. He was fearless in his approach to STEM topics and would not be easily sidestepped by his peers or by teachers or by tutors. Andrew explained to me that he did not like working with others because he felt like he could not do what he wanted to do. At one point when a student in his group was moved to partner with another group for a short while, to fill in for a student who was absent, Andrew cherished the time he could take charge of his own work. He was excited about STEM content and was consistently eager to work on all things related to STEM.

In choosing the focal participants Jada, Andrew, and Jacoby's social interaction between each other and also with their peers from the gifted classroom were meaningful for this study given the way that children were put together at Robert Smalls based on the magnet and the self-contained gifted programs. These programs, that brought children from outside the surrounding neighborhood into Robert Smalls, were meant to desegregate the school. The interactions, therefore, between students from the neighborhood and students outside the neighborhood provided a deeper look into the consequences of desegregation practices, local geography, and race embedded within the everyday lives of Jada, Jacoby, and Andrew at Robert Smalls.

Staff Description. Mrs. Canaan is a tenured, Black female teacher. She is the wife of a local minister and has deep community roots. I would see her making personal connections to the

Black children in her classroom with information that only someone from the community would know, like who their grandparents were or what church they went to. While Mrs. Canaan usually taught the traditional curriculum required by Prairie school district during the STEM time three to four days a week, she was either supervising a set of groups during the Mission 5 project or was responsible for teaching social studies when groups of students rotated through the STEM Lab for the Shower Gel project (projects explained later in the chapter). Mrs. Canaan and Ms. Stuart are the two general education fifth grade teachers. Ms. Stuart is a white female and a first-year teacher at Robert Smalls. Ms. Stuart while originally from Prairie, did not live within the north end of town. Like Mrs. Canaan though, Ms. Stuart was also responsible for watching over certain groups during the Mission 5 project and for teaching the general science curriculum that was used across the school district during the Shower Gel rotation.

The third teacher, Mrs. Mohr, was a white female tenured teacher who was in charge of the fifth grade self-contained gifted classroom. Mrs. Mohr was also the primary author of the Mission 5 project and was in charge of explaining, adjusting lessons, and generally leading the project. She also created the supplementary website and worksheets. Mrs. Mohr was also heavily involved in the original application narrative that was required to apply for magnet funds. She was a part of the planning and implementation committee and saw the STEM magnet as a positive addition to the school. Mrs. Mohr also delivered the instructions each day for Mission 5 when they met together in their common space called the piazza and was in charge of overseeing and coordinating the STEM time when all three classes joined to participate together.

Data Collection Procedures

You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5).

I spent a total of ten weeks from mid-October to mid-December collecting observations, documents, and audio recordings at Robert Smalls. During these ten weeks, 35 separate site visits occurred that lasted two hours each for a total of 70 hours in the field. During this period, I spent my time observing and talking to all of the main participants as they interacted and talked with their peers and teachers and while they engaged in the STEM activities. The conversations they held with their peers and teachers were also recorded to help write fieldnotes and document evidence pertaining to the research questions and the phenomenon of interest. There were six hours of audio recording all together. After the observation, I spent the afternoon writing up my fieldnotes, listening to and typing out the recorded audio into transcripts, and collecting and reviewing pictures of relevant artifacts created by or presented to the participants at Robert Smalls.

During this time period, the two general education classrooms and the one gifted classroom, joined together and split into smaller groups to work on the projects. While the school required that a block of time be used for STEM-related activities, the fifth grade teachers were given the autonomy to choose the best time to fit STEM into their schedules. STEM offerings were taught in addition to the traditional curriculum that all other schools taught in the district. During this STEM time (roughly between 9 am to 11 am), I observed two STEM related projects. The first one was designed by Mrs. Mohr and implemented by all the fifth grade teachers. The second project was designed by Dr. Jay, a chemistry professor from the local

university, and was completed by a joint effort between the teachers and local university personnel.

Mission 5: Project description. The first project from which I collected data was called Mission 5. Mission 5 was a project that posed a hypothetical problem that the students had to solve within their groups. The problem posed by Mrs. Mohr through her website was the following:

> Oh no! A spaceship has been mysteriously transported to a far distant galaxy! The wormhole they fell into is strictly one-way. The world space agencies have already launched a rescue mission, but it will take 20 years to get there! Unfortunately, the missing ship was designed for a short-term mission, and it won't support the astronauts for very long. Luckily, one more ship can go through the wormhole before it closes forever. You have been chosen for a very special and important mission: you will design a spaceship on which you and the crew can live for the 20 years it takes for the rescue mission to arrive…Engineers are waiting to transform your designs into reality… (teacher website, 2015)[26]

Students worked in groups of seven or eight to create a schematic design together based on their assigned portion of the overall schematic. Each group was asked to work on one of the following areas needed to complete the schematic design: Crew quarters, greenhouse, barnyard, water facility, recycling center, air purification, and ship's hull. The following figure 4 shows the collection of all the finished components that each group worked on.

[26] General citation used in order to meet IRB protocol of anonymity of participants and school site.

Figure 4. Mission 5 Schematic Design. Each poster board represents a different component of the overall schematic design. The poster boards represented the waste and recycling facility, crew quarters, greenhouse, water facility, barnyard, air purification, and the ship's hull.

The students worked in their respective groups and had to come to a consensus on planning and designing their system, in order to make sure the astronauts were self-sufficient and could live for 20 years on the newly designed ship.

Mission 5: Data collection procedures. After Mrs. Mohr gave the instructions for the Mission 5 activity, each group was dismissed one by one to move to their respective area and continue working on their portion of the project. Jacoby and Andrew were both a part of the greenhouse group and were in a mixed group with female and male students from all three fifth grade classrooms. Jada and Serena were a part of the Water Facility group. This group was also mixed with female and male students from all three classrooms. During this assigned group time, I spent half my time during each observation with the Greenhouse group and half my time with

the Water Facility group. I also took notes and asked questions to the participants, in order to get their opinion on what they were doing or to clarify what was going on, while making sure not to interrupt their normal interactions within their group. I recorded official conversations that teachers had with their students as well as student-to-student conversations that occurred within the setting.

In my fieldnotes, I included the seating arrangement of the students. While open seating was not always the class routine, groups during Mission 5 were allowed to choose how they arranged themselves within their assigned spaces. If a student moved to a seat next to another student in the group, I noted these movements and recorded the conversations in my classroom notes. During the group discussions, my recorder remained on. From the recorded conversations and my notes from observing and interacting with the group, I wrote up my fieldnotes later that day. Also, while traveling home, I recorded myself talking out loud about what happened in the classroom that day. These recordings totaled three hours all together and was used to help write up the fieldnotes at the end of day.

Shower Gel: Project description. The second project I observed after Mission 5 was the Shower Gel Lab activity. As a part of the STEM magnet, a major component of the application stated that they would collaborate with the local university to promote STEM related activities and partnerships. Dr. Jay, a chemistry professor from the local university, was asked by the school to conduct a chemistry related lab with the 5th graders. When I spoke to Dr. Jay, he explained how he modeled his lab assignment based on giving students multiple opportunities to create shower gel by changing the formula each time and adding different amounts of different chemicals in order to change the qualities of the gel (e.g., soapier, more moisturizer, more conditioner, different scents and colors). The lab was designed to have students take home their

shower gel and use them personally while showering after each batch was completed. The next time the students went to the lab, they could adjust the formula based on their experience using their shower gel while bathing. Students had three rounds in which they could experiment with adjusting the formula based on how they wanted the shower gel to look, smell, and work. The three batch cycles helped determine which formula each group preferred best. After the three test trials were conducted, the class voted on which formula to use. Once a consensus was reached, the students made batches to sell at a local shopping mall in order to advertise to the community, the STEM related curricular benefits at Robert Smalls, which was intended to promote the school within Prairie's school of choice system.

When working through the Shower Gel Lab, the teachers organized students into pairings and trios. When I asked them how these pairings and trios were assigned, Mrs. Mohr told me that gifted students were placed with general education students in order to promote interaction between the gifted and general education classrooms. Due to the lab space not being large enough to accommodate all the fifth graders at the same time, the teachers divided the pairings and trios into three large groups so that each group could rotate through the STEM lab one at a time. While one group was in the lab, the other two groups would receive the traditional social studies and science curriculum back in the classroom with Mrs. Canaan and Ms. Stuart. The groups would rotate through the lab, seen in figure 5 below, three times during this project. All my observations and participation occurred only in the lab setting and not back in the classrooms. During this lab, Jacoby (male, Black) was paired with Tucker (male, white) from the gifted classroom. Andrew was paired with Michael (male, Black) from a general education classroom and Bryan (male, white) from the gifted classroom. Serena (female, Black) was paired with Hezekiah (male, Black) from the general education classroom. Jada (female, Black) was

paired with Allison (female, white) from the gifted classroom. The interactions between these focal participants and their partners are highlighted in chapter six.

Figure 5. STEM Laboratory. This picture shows the STEM lab tables with the equipment needed to complete the shower gel lab. Each table was its own individual station and setup where the student pairs were assigned to create their shower gel.

Shower Gel: Data collection procedures. I followed the same procedures of taking notes as a participant observer, taking pictures of student work, and recording participants' dialogue with other students and teachers within the lab setting. With now four separate participants to follow, I was apprehensive that I would not have enough time to follow and observe all four within the given time frame. However, after seeing the arrangements of students, only two out of the four focal participants were in the STEM lab at any given time. Therefore, I split my time and spent an hour with each of the two participants while they engaged in the Shower Gel Lab activity.

Document collection procedures. The primary documents for this dissertation have been collected from a variety of sources. I found documents by searching the school district's website, which posts minutes of public meetings related to racial equity issues, local newspaper articles pertaining to Robert Smalls becoming a magnet school, and documents found on a local

library forum that contains literature related to Black history in Prairie. I also asked Mrs. Mohr for the magnet narrative included with the school's application for federal funding, which explained why Robert Smalls was a school that needed a magnet program. I emailed Prairie school district's Director for Equity for documentation pertaining to district initiatives and data about gifted education. I asked the assistant superintendent by email to see if there were any documents that discussed the placement of self-contained gifted in north end schools. I also searched other public sources (e.g., State School Report Card, U.S. Census Bureau) to help with the racial and demographic breakdown of the school and community. Court documents were also found online through searching through federal court filings at uscourts.gov. Pictures of the final STEM products, worksheets, and project instructions were collected as relevant documents for use in my fieldnotes as well as for reference in the findings sections. These pictures provided examples of the student participants' actions and decisions made while working on Mission 5 and the Shower Gel Lab and were useful pieces of evidence representing the work they completed.

Role of the researcher. When collecting data as a participant observer, I had to first establish who I was in relation to the students in the 5th grade as well as to my focal participants. My role as the researcher in their classroom had to be distinguished from the teacher's role, tutor's role, and guest speaker's role. I was none of these things. I was not their teacher and I made sure they understood this. I never talked about my former teacher status as I thought it would be a hindrance in my observation and interaction with the main participants. I also made the distinction that I was not a tutor and was not there to help them with their work. I was also not there as a guest speaker in presenting new knowledge. When I explained my role as a researcher to the students, I told them that my job was to study what was going on in the

classroom, which meant that I wanted to know how they normally interacted and worked on STEM projects. I also told them that I was interested in getting to know their thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and experiences as they worked on the STEM activities.

After explaining my role as a researcher to the students, it still took time for them to see me in this role. General students and the focal participants both tested me while I was in the field, as they verified whether I was truly what I said I was or if I was instead an authority figure that would tell the teachers what they were saying privately. They would make statements into the audio recorder which they thought were inappropriate to see what my reaction would be. Eventually, they felt comfortable enough with me that when one student did say something inappropriate and then looked at me with nervousness because it was not meant for adults to hear, others would reassure him by saying, "He won't tell." Also, at one point in the data collection process, Serena asked why I wanted to follow her since she was not very good at the "STEM stuff." When asking her what she meant, she told me that there were better people I could be observing, people who were better at doing STEM work. I reassured her that I was not there to evaluate whether students were "good" or "bad" with STEM activities, but was more interested in observing and watching what she would normally do every day during STEM time. Yet, even after reassuring her, she still seemed confused as to why I would choose to follow her around.

These issues related to how I was perceived by students in my research role are important because as a researcher that is conducting the fieldwork, my eyes and ears were the main instruments used to collect data in the field. It is through what I observed and what I heard through the students' interaction with one another and also with their teacher, that I am using to write up the findings of this study. Therefore, how I engaged in my role as a participant observer

and how I found my way through the maze of being an adult that needed to be trusted by children was a journey in itself. I had to have a relationship with the participants and their peers that was safe enough to get their authentic interactions and conversations without making them feel as if they had to act different in front of me. Although it took some time, eventually students began to just go about their everyday routine even with me next to them. This was important, because as an ethnographic researcher, I needed to observe their normal everyday interactions over a period of time in order to gain insights into their experiences as they worked on the STEM projects.

Positionality. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) argued that one must understand who the researcher is and how his or her presence affects what their focus in the field is as well as how they represent people and their interactions. As Emerson notes, a qualitative researcher needs to "get close" and experience a "deeper immersion" in order to represent "and reveal the multiple truths apparent in other's lives" (p. 2-3). In this regard, no field researcher is "neutral" or "detached" from the "observed phenomenon." If an ethnographer's role is to immerse themselves in the lives and perceptions held by others, an intertwining occurs between the researcher and the participants. This intertwining of relationships is not considered "contamination" (Emerson et al., 2011). Rather, this closeness to the participants "heightens sensitivity to social life as a process" (p. 4).

Which interactions and conversations a researcher chooses to prioritize depends on the research questions and the methodology and also is based on the positionality of the researcher (e.g., background, experiences, race, gender, class, occupation). The history of anthropology is filled with ethnocentrism (Villenas, 1996); therefore, the days of being an "outsider" with an objective view is no longer acceptable in qualitative research. I understand that my views (e.g.,

assumptions, agendas, and epistemology) will shape my narrative and impact how I represent participants and the institution I observe. The reader must understand who I am in order to consider my research with a clearer perspective.

Representation is crucial as researchers conduct ethnographies. The worldview of the participants is of utmost importance and consequently, so is the researcher's acceptance of multiple interconnected "contexts" and "intersections" of people (Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Thorne, 1993). In ethnography, situating the participants in the local and broader national context is vital to better understanding the complexities in their truths, but equally vital is situating the researcher through whose lens the reader meets the participants. Who I am and where I come from must all be presented for the reader so they might have a better sense of who is actually collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and representing the interactions in the classroom.

My positionality as a researcher and a writer comes from a myriad of life experiences including my childhood, professional career, graduate program, and my religious background. These seasons of my life are not categorically distinct in which each part corresponds to different positions and views I hold. Rather, a messy amalgam of ideology results throughout life that I will attempt to explain in this section.

Childhood, race, and socioeconomic status. I was born in the United States and therefore am an American citizen, yet from early on in life I realized that I was a different kind of American. I struggled with speaking English at preschool because I only spoke Korean, the predominant language spoken at home. I remember taking a test to enter into a gifted magnet school in Chicago and even though my sister passed a few years prior, I had failed. I watched my mother at the bottom of the stairs reading the rejection letter in tears. My parents decided that due to my "low academic aptitude," we had to move to a better school district, one that did not

require admissions testing. I moved to a suburb of Chicago and attended elementary school (K-8) and high school (9-12) in that same suburb. While my elementary school classes were diverse with fellow Indian, Assyrian, and Korean classmates, we had very few Black students. My high school was the same way, with great ethnic diversity though very few Black classmates. I grew up in this suburban environment, studying, taking advanced level courses, and socializing with other classmates from a predominantly middle class background. Still, even though we lived in a decent house and I attended a good school, I knew I was different. My dad owned a dollar store in Chicago. Unlike my peers, I had to work at the store every summer and Christmas season. I never wanted to work like my father when I grew up.

My parents had succeeded in buying a house in a suburb, yet the culture of the middle class was lost on them. Most of my clothes were hand-me-down, and I rarely experienced shopping with my parents. They never provided an allowance to help pay for social outings with friends. They never came to my football games or any other events except graduation. I felt underprivileged compared to my peers. However, when I worked at the store, it was clear that we were the ones who were privileged. We owned a store filled to the brim with merchandise when many in the community who frequented the store had to buy items on credit with my father. I did not understand this privilege because my reality was my suburban life. I still felt underprivileged.

Social and racial awakening. While at college, I engaged in a local church that encouraged its members to find meaningful careers to make a difference. I decided to become a teacher because I thought that I could impact my students' lives. While I felt out of place growing up, I now had a college degree, a profession, and an adequate income. My life was starting afresh and the opportunities seemed limitless. I would now bridge the gap for students who also struggled to fit in. As a first year teacher, however, I did not understand the school

system into which I was first hired; it was nothing like my own schooling experience. While I grew up watching *Dangerous Minds* and *Freedom Writers*, the experiences in my classroom were far from inspiring. My class was out of control and I had to become an agent of the institution, wielding unyielding authority and at times incorrectly blaming students for their lack of respect and disruptiveness.

A couple of years after I began teaching, I was accepted into a graduate program and started taking classes related to curriculum and instruction. While a majority of the classes had a colorblind view of curriculum and instruction, I was fortunate to take a few courses that explored the intersection of schooling and race that helped paint a different picture of the current realities of public education in diverse urban environments. Socializing with Black graduate peers also gave me a renewed sense of vigor for equity in schooling. I always had an eye on justice, especially racial justice in schools, as I remembered the microaggressions and the not-so-micro aggressions spoken about my appearance, my intelligence, and my social class while growing up. My relationships, in particular with Black women academics, educated me about life from their perspective. Studying critical race theory and contemplating my own racial identity helped shape my positionality as a researcher.

My positionality as a researcher. I am Korean American. My ethnicity is Korean and my nationality is American. While my ethnicity is Korean, I am an American imbued with the American spirit - not in the traditional sense where I feel compelled to stand during the pledge of allegiance or chant U.S.A. at national sporting events, but as someone who belongs in this country. As a Korean American member of the professional class, I acknowledge that I am a person of privilege. Though I often felt underprivileged as a child, I thrived under a system of white dominance where I was given the role of a model minority. I cherished this expectation of

excellence. Having teachers whose expectation was for me to succeed propelled me to college along with hardworking parents who helped pay for my tuition and living expenses.

The Asian American model minority status is complicated. I used to relish in it and believed that with my own wits and effort, I could merit success, or pull myself up by the proverbial bootstraps. If I, as an immigrant's child, can find success through my own merit, surely Black and Latino Americans can too. Problematically, this bootstraps syllogism leads to my Asian American success being used as a tool to discipline other communities of color, to quell protests of systematic injustice. The model minority myth is thus deceiving; despite being a tool for mainstream America, I am not considered a mainstream American. Asians are viewed as a perpetual other, no matter how many generations of American citizens exist in an Asian American's lineage.

With this understanding of my own cultural background, I no longer relish in my model minority status. I refuse to allow my success to be used as a tool to cover up the injustice in a meritocratic, unfair society. I refuse to settle for the offer of being a notch below first class citizenship by stepping on other races who are treated as second class. I challenge the notion that I should be silent and grateful, that I should not ruffle feathers in exchange for modest economic success. Thus, I will speak up about issues of racial justice in America.

The question may arise about my intentions in pursuing my chosen phenomenon of interest. Why should an Asian American man from an immigrant, middle class background study Black students and the inequity they face in education? Initially, the answer may sound simple. Because of the demographics of the schools in which I taught, the students I empathized with the most happen to be Black. Of course our experiences are not identical, but my struggles in school also stemmed from social status and racial expectations. For example, although I enjoyed and

excelled at history and literature, my teachers and parents expected me to excel in science or math. My teachers asked me publicly if I regularly shaved my legs or put a bowl on my head to cut my hair. My struggles were also with the notion that I had to work harder than everybody else in order to make it. My parents consistently reminded me that I had to be thrice as good as a white classmate to receive the same benefit. I accepted this paradigm without much thought. Not until I grew older did I realize how unfair the model minority myth was. Instead of being a mediocre white male, I had to be an excellent Asian male just to have the same chances and opportunities in life. For example, I was chastised by teachers, or now employers, if I chose to work only as hard as my white friends or coworkers, while they received the benefit of the doubt or even praise or promotion. As an adult, my empathy grew for the plight of those whose racial and social struggles resounded similarly. I thought being a teacher would allow me to reach those who were like myself.

Despite my feelings of empathy, I soon realized our struggles were not considered the same within a school system. As most socially conscious teachers learn very quickly, one teacher's good intentions are not enough; schools have systems in place that do not necessarily help students with extra needs. Rather, they are seen as a burden to teaching and passing standardized test scores. Burdensome students, I soon learned, were not white, nor were they Asian American. My empathy grew into indignation, though I admit as a teacher I failed certain students when I grew too busy or tired. These failures haunt me.

As an active community member, I am haunted by my failures more often than I would like. I recently ran into a former student at Wal-Mart, who had caused me much grief my first year of teaching. We parked our carts in an aisle and she explained her frustration in trying to enroll in a local community college because she could not understand all the documents required

to file her FAFSA. I thought I could help and offered her my number. I was eager to help a former student, possibly to atone for my own failure when I used my authority to dismiss her problems or needs as disruptive or disrespectful. We physically walked into the community college for help and as a young Black woman with a child, it was clear that she did not belong. I held her one-year-old daughter as she explained to the FAFSA office what she needed. She was sent to a computer out in the hallway on her own with no special attention or individualized help. I sat there with her and helped her fill out the form. Two other students were next to her filling out their FAFSA, both people of color, and asked for my help after we finished. I told them I was not an employee but would do my best.

As my former student continued to fill in the form, I wondered why it was so difficult for her to enroll in a community college. The paperwork is convoluted and confusing, even for an educated adult. If a student had no adult, whether teacher or parent, to help navigate through the documents, the paperwork itself is a hindrance to college entrance. If the student perseveres and asks for help, as my former student had done, she must still confront the school's administration policies and employees. For instance, everyone we spoke to at the admissions office was a white person. As I held her baby or spoke up to ask a question when they answered in a confusing manner, they would stare at me blankly, as if trying to figure out my relationship to my former student. They answered questions as briefly as possible and offered no assistance to my student or the other applicants in the hallway, despite the fact that they were clearly confused. These types of experiences helped me realize that a single empathetic teacher with good intentions, even one who takes the time to accompany his student to the admissions office, cannot overcome the systematic problems that intersect with race. So I return to the question of my interest in Black educational experiences. My own feelings of alienation due to my race and my empathy

for others in similar situations are only part of the answer. The other part deals with understanding a white dominant framework that uses the model minority and meritocracy to justify the discrimination against and further alienation of Black and Brown bodies, while simultaneously building systems that inherently block people of color from finding success.

Final thoughts on positionality and the role of a researcher. My positionality now focuses on the importance of giving voice to issues of race in school. While I am a not Black, the injustice and race problems that Black children experience in public education must continually be brought to the forefront in order to remedy and enact change. Furthermore, Asian Americans are cast as the model minority and second-tier white Americans. My work in this dissertation also challenges the narrative that my race is supposed to support the white power structure and prove that meritocracy reigns. My research aims to dispute the narrative that if people of color fail, it is due solely to their choices or disposition and not due to historical laws, culture, and access that favors white America over people of color. I ally myself with issues of injustice faced by the Black community in public education and work on voicing, naming, and bringing to light inequities that persist in public education.

Data Analysis

> *The fieldworker begins to sift systematically through the many pages of fieldnote accounts…looking to identify threads that can be woven together to tell a story about the observed social world. The ultimate goal is to produce coherent, focused analyses of aspects of the social life that have been observed and recorded, analyses that are comprehensible to readers who are not directly acquainted with the social world at issue. (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 171)*

After each field site visit, I would take time to write fieldnotes related to the experiences I had witnessed and engaged in as a participant observer. While the initial fieldnotes were general, as I spent more time at the site my awareness of the social processes increased and I began to notice new and different interactions between the main participants and their peers/teachers that was happening around me. This growing awareness was recorded in my process memos, which were written in addition to the fieldnotes. Also, I reviewed the audio transcription and made notes of specific conversations that I thought meaningful while conducting fieldwork.

Once all the site visits were completed and I had all my fieldnotes and transcriptions, I read all of them together, "taking in the entire record of the field experiences as it has evolved over time" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2010, p. 171). As I read over the entire set of fieldnotes, I began to look more intensively at the data set reflecting and analyzing its contents. I used an ethnographic process called open coding in which I went line by line categorizing interactions, events, ideas, themes, and any and all issues that I observed at the school. This process created a variety of different codes with no thematic link. Some of the codes I saw in the data set were related to student interactions, off task behavior, on task behavior, disagreements between peers, teacher directions, time limits, student movement, student discipline, and classroom distinctions between general education and gifted. As I began to explore these open codes, I also wrote code memos in order to keep track of the insights I had about the different processes and social interactions occurring in my notes. Writing out code memos also helped me to sort and make sense of the codes as well.

After open coding the fieldnotes, I then began to collapse similar themes and think about the relationship between different codes that eventually shaped my thematic units. This narrowing of the open codes into focused coding helped me to do a fine grain analysis in which I

went line by line based on a set of themes from the open coding that were of interest to this study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The focused codes/themes of interest in this study were based on the racial and geographic consequences that placed magnet and gifted programs at Robert Smalls. More specifically, the main themes explored more in chapter five, pertain to the teacher's magnet focus, the main participants' agency as they participated in STEM activities, and the interactions between the teachers and the participants within this setting. These themes were important because of the racialized context within Prairie city, where the school district used magnet programs in order convince white families to enroll in Black majority north end schools. The purpose and use of STEM magnet at Robert Smalls, therefore, often conflicted with how the main participants' demonstrated their agency. These conflicted interactions between the teachers and the main participants were highlighted in chapter five.

In chapter six, the main thematic codes used for analysis focused on the interactions between the main participants who were all from the general education classes and the gifted students. Themes centered on who assumed the role of leadership and the consequences of that choice as well as how the group decided whose knowledge counted when it came to contributing to the STEM related work. These themes were significant because the battle over who assumed leadership responsibilities or who knew more about the STEM related project had consequences that reverberated throughout the STEM work time. The interactions between the general education students and gifted students are also salient because of the district's decision to put gifted classrooms in segregated north end schools, with the hope of attracting white families by catering to their educational interests.

In terms of the thematic analysis conducted on the documents, I searched for information pertaining to the use of magnet and gifted programs in order to overcome both racial and

geographic discrimination within Prairie school district. The themes specifically used were racial conflicts, geographical biases, purpose of magnet programming, and a racialized gifted education program. These thematic searches yielded the necessary information regarding Prairie's past racial discrimination toward Black children as well as the consequences of geography as seen through the segregated schools in the north end. Further, the purpose and use of the magnet and gifted programs to address these racial and geographic biases of north end schools is further discussed in chapter four as well.

As I began to reflect on the different pieces of evidence based on the themes mentioned before, I wrote integrative memos that helped flush out my thinking in regards to the data set. In these integrative memos, I wrote about the different themes and topics from the data that related to one another, which eventually led to my analytic assertions. Trying to elaborate on and connect smaller pieces of data together thematically was not a linear process. At times, I would think about the link or connection to multiple data points that could come together to show a specific theme, only to get lost in a sea of sub-themes that confused the thematic hierarchy. At this point, going back to the code memos as well as the more focused coding helped me flush out the connections and relationships between data points. These data connections allowed me to form the different analytic assertions that could be supported by evidence in my field notes, transcriptions, and documents.

Developing my analytic assertions based on the focused themes required me to take a step back in order to keep in mind the phenomenon of interest and the contribution that I wanted to make with this data set. By working and re-working the hierarchy and organization of themes and subthemes, while at the same time keeping in mind the frame of analyses based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Spatial Perspectives (CSP), I began to develop my analytic

language based on decisions I made in how the case study would be written up. Developing a narrative arc was also integral in helping me think about how each successive findings chapter built on the theoretical framework and the everyday experiences of the main participants.

Conclusion

The goal of this study is to better understand the experiences of Black students as they engaged in STEM activities at Robert Smalls. In this chapter I also described the ethnographic approach used in order to immerse myself as a participant observer into the classroom to see the daily interactions between the participants and their peers as well as their teachers. In so doing, I hope to better understand their world and how they make sense and meaning of both the magnet program as well as their interactions with their peers in that setting. My positionality statement explained my understanding of my own race in relation to the Black participants in this study.

Following this methods chapter will be my three findings chapters. Chapter four, which is next, uses a thematic analysis of the documents collected to show the embedded racial and geographic discrimination within Prairie school district. Also, the school districts response by using market-oriented programs (i.e., magnet, gifted) are highlighted to set the scene for the structures and systems in place at Robert Smalls where the main participants went to school. Chapter five then delves into the everyday experiences and narratives of the main participants and their agency within the STEM activities. I present evidence and discuss their agency versus the teacher's prescribed notions of how STEM should be enacted within the school. Chapter six then follows with an analysis of the interactions between the focal participants and their gifted peers within the STEM setting.

CHAPTER 4: CATERING TO WHITE INTERESTS: PRAIRIE'S STRUGGLE WITH RACE, GEOGRAPHY, AND SCHOOLING

Within American society, catering to white interests has been and continues to be a normalized and pervasive phenomenon within everyday life (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Within the field of education, urban school districts have catered to and prioritized white educational concerns and interests (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006). For example, in this case study, Prairie school district's current and past schooling practices catered to white demands regarding keeping schools segregated that discriminated against Black children in the community. The district's mandatory busing of Black children to majority white schools placed an unfair burden on Black families as white children were not forced to leave their white majority schools. Or the district advocating for new schools to be placed in majority white neighborhoods because schools in Black neighborhoods were difficult to integrate, meant, more new schools for white families. Prairie's pursuit in preventing white flight to neighboring towns and/or private schools also meant that they were willing to implement specialized magnet programs and self-contained gifted classrooms designed to meet white curricular needs.

All three previously mentioned examples in which Prairie continued to prioritize white educational interests, had equity implications for Black children who lived in the north end of town. Local school decisions regarding magnet programming were based on a racialized geography where white parents did not want to send their children to Black majority schools in the north end. This conflict between white residents and Black residents, based on their preferences regarding school assignment, was met by a school district trying to appease Black concerns without alienating the white community. On one side of this school assignment issue,

Black activists and families sued the district for their discriminatory practices including unfair busing and arbitrary assignment of Black children to schools which continued to segregate north end schools. On the other side of this issue were white families, who wanted to retain their white majority south end schools and who did not want a school assignment process that could have their children go to school in the north end.

As the school district tried to negotiate these conflicts of interests regarding school assignment, the community at large also publicly struggled with how to best address these opposing concerns. In the first half of this chapter, evidence is presented showing the preference of white families to remain in south end schools. Also, the school district's response to white schooling preferences played into their suggestions of where to build new facilities within the district. The battle over the geographical location of where new schools should be built, represented the overt racial discrimination that all north end schools faced as well as a school district that did not want to alienate white families. In the second half of this chapter, the school district's decision to use and implement magnet programming and self-contained gifted education in north end schools, will be discussed within the context of a racialized geography pertaining to school assignment.

The racialized geography within Prairie city is important to this case study because this context shaped the local decisions made by the school district regarding magnet programming and trying to address white and Black concerns regarding school assignment. The local decisions regarding where to implement magnet and gifted programming also had consequences within the everyday lives of the focal participants in this study. The district's purpose and uses of the magnet and gifted programs provide the necessary context in order to better understand the

interactions that the Black participants had with their teachers and with their white peers as they attended school at Robert Smalls.

Spatial Preferences: Racial and Geographic Biases

Brief history. Prairie school district had long struggled with competing white and Black interests in regards to which schools children from different racial backgrounds could attend. As mentioned in chapter three, Prairie had a history of discriminating against Black children within the district. During the times of de jure and de facto segregation, Black children who lived in the north end attended schools within their neighborhoods, but the few white children who lived in the north end were bussed to white majority schools in the south end of town (local newspaper, 1996). In addition, more schools were historically closed on the north end and more schools were historically built on the south end, creating a lack of seats in the north side for the Black community (local newspaper, 2002). As a response, the district mandatorily bussed 550 Black children to south end schools, in an effort both to desegregate and prevent having to build more schools in the north end. This preferential treatment given to white educational interests of having white children attend schools in the south end only placed an unfair burden on Black families, whose children were arbitrarily bussed to different south end schools. In response to forced busing, Black activists and families filed a lawsuit with the Office of Civil Rights in 1996 claiming discrimination.

Eventually this civil rights lawsuit over forced busing was expanded, in 2002, as more evidence was brought forth to a federal judge, showing additional discriminatory practices within Prairie. There was an overrepresentation of Black children in suspension rates, special education placement, and an underrepresentation of Black children in honors classes and gifted programs. The district, based on the presented evidence, entered into a consent decree in order to address

these racial disparities and outcomes. One major result of this lawsuit and consent decree was the elimination of the arbitrary assignment of children to schools in the district. Instead, the district adopted a controlled choice policy, which required every parent in the district to apply and rank the schools they wanted their child to attend. All schools in the north and south end were now open for kindergarten registration or transfer applications to any and all parents in the school district. The controlled choice policy used a computer program to factor in all the variables (e.g., proximity to school, income level, education level of parents, etc.) in assigning a school. While the proximity of a child's home to the closest school was still a primary factor, a person's housing location no longer guaranteed a specific school within the district. This controlled choice program was designed to give the school district the tools needed to desegregate schools and not be confined by racially segregated neighborhoods. However, this change in the school assignment policy did not bode well with white residents within the school district and began a mass exodus of white families to private schools and to the surrounding towns, which were still a majority white.

A changing demographic. As evidence of this white flight, Table 4, below shows the continued decrease in the white student enrollment within Prairie public schools. After the 2002 consent decree, the white student demographic continued to decrease every year within the district.

Table 4[27]

Prairie School District Demographic Comparison over Time (2002 and 2015)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Total Enrollment
2002	60.7	30.9	2.8	5.5	8,967
2003	59	31.7	3.1	6.0	9,017
2004	53.3	34.8	4.3	7.3	9,031
2005	51.9	34.6	4.7	8.4	8,950
2006	49.6	35.9	5.2	8.9	8,897
2007	47.9	36.6	5.7	9.3	8,914
2008	46.8	36.9	6.3	9.6	8,843
2009	45.7	37.3	6.8	9.8	8,824
2010	44.3	38.1	7.3	9.9	8,893
2011	42.2	35.6	8.0	9.4	9,179
2012	41.2	34.9	8.8	9.7	9,208
2013	40.3	34.2	9.5	9.8	9,383
2014	39.9	33.8	9.9	9.9	9,439
2015	38.7	34.3	10.3	9.7	9,948
Increase (+) or Decrease (-)	-22%	+3.4%	+7.5	+4.2	+981

Within the span of thirteen years, Prairie's enrollment increased by a modest 981 students, but their percentage of white students in the district fell 22%. Black, Hispanic, and Asian student enrollment, however, all slightly increased. White flight out of Prairie school district into neighboring towns and into private schools was also a commonly talked about phenomenon as mentioned below by a school board member in 2006.

> We're seeing white families leave, and that's not in the best interests of African American students, [Black Board Member] said. I want to help white families stay in the district, but to make our decisions in ways to draw white families back is naive. They're not leaving because of buildings. They're leaving because there are too many black kids in class with their kids (Local Newspaper, 2006).[28]

[27] Data taken from the State Board of Education e-report cards.

[28] Black school board member

This response from the Black board member acknowledges that white flight was occurring in the district and supports the data presented in Table 4. Not only was there a decrease in white students within the school district, but the shift in demographics was related to anti-blackness by white families. Not having the guarantee of a neighborhood school for white families in the south end, due to the controlled choice policy, was problematic for white families who did not want their children to attend schools with a Black majority. Therefore, white parents who were concerned about school assignment choices had two other options available. One option was to attend one of the eleven private schools within Prairie and the other option was to move to a neighboring rural town which still had a majority white student demographic within its public school system. Even as the white student population reached an all-time low of 38.7% in 2015, the white resident population within the city of Prairie continued to hold at 67.1%[29]. In 2015, white residents were still the majority racial group within the city, which shows the growing use of private schools within town.

White bias against north end schools. White residents in Prairie already had geographic preferences for schools within the community. North end schools, which had a majority Black student demographic, were in less demand than prominent south end schools. Figure 6, Table 5 and Table 7, together show the continued geographic biases that north end schools faced within the city. Figure 6 below, is a geographic map of city of Prairie that shows both the racial makeup of the community as well as the physical location of each school.

[29] Statistic retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates (2011-2015)

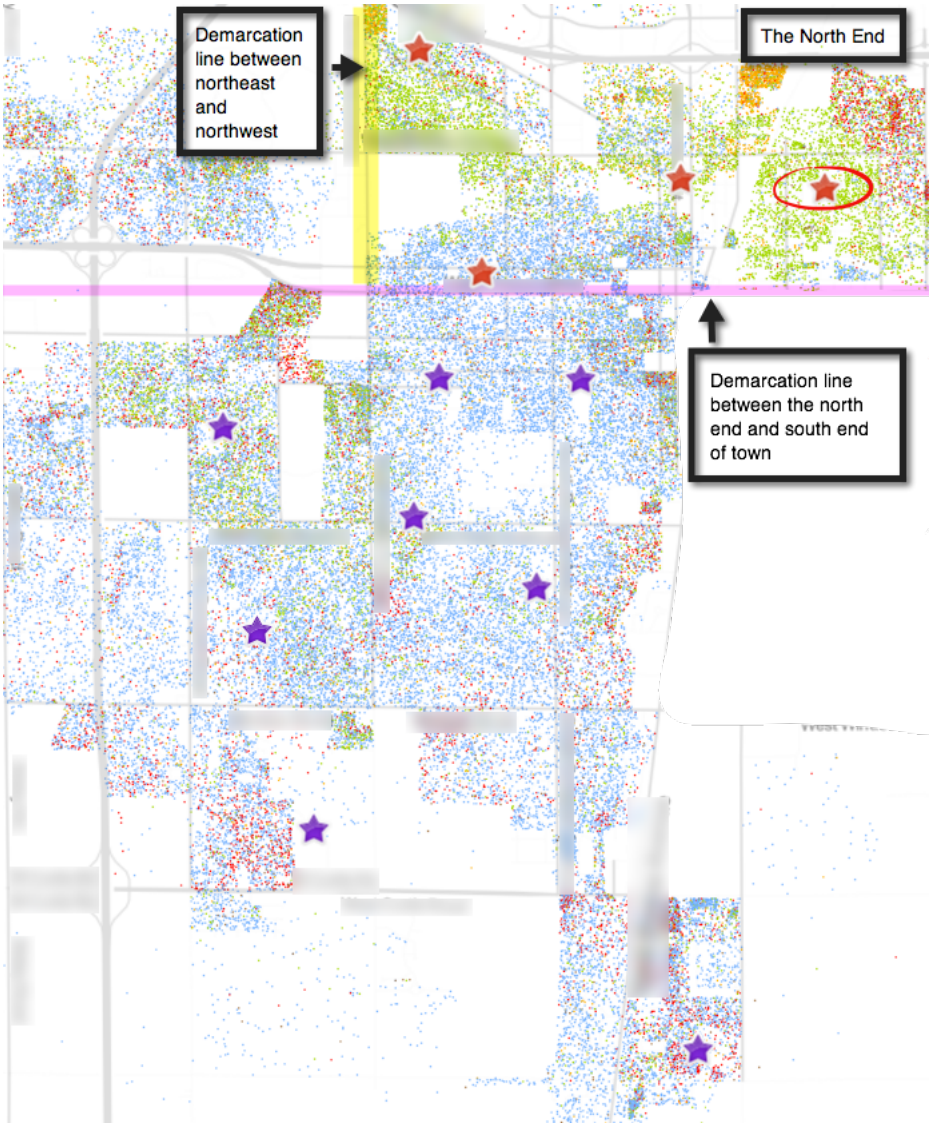

Figure 6. The location of the twelve elementary schools in Prairie school district. Purple stars represent elementary schools located in the south end of town and the orange stars represent the north end elementary schools. Robert Smalls is circled. Borders separating north from south and northwest from northeast are in purple and yellow, respectively. Green dots represent the Black population, blue dots represent the white population, red dots represent the Asian population, and orange dots represent the Hispanic population

Schools within the north end are represented by orange stars and are predominantly within Black majority neighborhoods as indicated by the green dots. Schools in the south end are represented by purple stars. Also, the difference between north end and south end schools were not financial or curricular, as all schools were a part of the same unified district. All the schools followed the

same district curriculum and received an equal share of the resources. The major difference, therefore, between north and south end schools was in the student racial demographic, as Table 5 shows, and the demand for the schools by parents within the district, as Table 6 shows. Table 5 below, ranks the eleven elementary schools in Prairie based on the percentage of Black students in each of the schools. Schools 1 through 4 are all located on the north end of town and had the largest Black student body percentages, while Schools 5 through 11 were all located in the south end of town and had majority white student body percentages. This racial segregation within Prairie school district between north and south end schools continued to impact the school assignment process for white families as also noted by the Black school board member earlier.

Table 5[30]

Schools Ranked From Highest Black Student Body Percentage to the Lowest (2015)

Elementary Schools	Enrollment	Black Percentage	White Percentage
North end school	470	56.7	15.3
Robert Smalls	**365**	**52.1**	**25.2**
North end school	416	43.5	26.2
North end school	548	43.4	13
South end school	357	31.3	45.4
South end school	473	26	36.2
South end school	472	25.6	46.8
South end school	410	24.6	51
South end school	294	24.5	59.9
South end school	469	23	46.7
South end school	424	19.6	45.3

Table 6, below, further shows the demand for each of the elementary schools based on their geographic location within Prairie. All incoming kindergarten parents had to rank their five top choices for schools within the school district. The left column combined all the times that a specific school was listed as one of the five options on the applications. The right column shows how many times each school was placed as a first choice on the applications. The results show

[30] Data retrieved from Prairie school district

that, with the exception of one north end school, the preference within the community was for south end schools.

Table 6[31]

2015 Ranking of Schools Based on Controlled Choice Applications[32]

Elementary School	All Choices Combined	First Choice
South end school	418	108
South end school	367	107
South end school	351	85
South end school	341	61
South end school	277	47
South end school	257	44
North end school	248	60
South end school	234	43
North end school - Robert Smalls	202	49
North end school	200	46
North end school	182	14

The four north end schools, had the highest Black student body percentages and were the most under chosen schools within the school district. As Orfield (2013) noted in a market based system using choice systems, there are "winners" and "losers." The south end schools were "winners" and the north end schools were "losers" when it came to how many choices each school garnered from incoming families' applications. Robert Smalls was also under chosen when compared to the other schools in the district. While having the same kindergarten capacity as most south end schools (i.e. 69 seats), Robert Smalls only had 49 families choose the school as their first choice, which meant that only 153 other families put the school down as a second, third, fourth, or fifth option. Both the combined choices and first choices column point to a divide between north and south end schools in terms of interests and demands by white families in the school district. Given that the north end schools were predominantly Black points to Black

[31] Data retrieved from Prairie school district records
[32] Most schools had 96 seats available.

families choosing the north end schools more often than not. Further, in Table 6, the lower numbers within both columns at Black majority schools in the north end shows the preferences of white families to south end schools and the continued biases present with north end schools.

Catering to white geographical preferences. With the continued decrease of white students enrolled in Prairie public schools as well as the higher demand for schools outside the Black north end, the school district tried to figure out ways to meet the legal demands of the consent decree without further alienating white families from leaving. One salient example of this struggle, was a major disagreement over where new schools should be built within the community. For the Black activists and the Plaintiff's legal team that oversaw the consent decree, one of the legal requirements agreed to by the district, was to invest in the historically Black north end by building a new school there. For the school board and superintendent, building a school that white residents refused to attend only exacerbated the issue of segregated schooling within the district.

New school buildings also had to be approved by the community through a referendum that would raise property taxes. Therefore, the community also had an opportunity to weigh into where the new school should be built. For the Black north end residents, the school district in 1998, agreed to add two new school strands (i.e. 200 seats) to the north end as a response to the civil rights litigation, pertaining to forced busing of Black students against the district. These new strands would finally provide enough seats to meet the capacity for Black children living in the north end. However, in the coming years, the school district was slow to seek this funding and when they finally did in 2006 (8 years later) to build a north end school, they chose a site outside the historic Black north end, for a location within a white majority subdivision on the

northwest side. This referendum was ultimately defeated as the community voted against the proposed site (Figure 7).

This rejection of the referendum pointed to a deeper racial divide that existed in the community over schools and their geographic locations. The school district along with the white community advocated for these two new locations, one situated in the northwest corner of town and the other situated in the southeast corner in a neighboring village, which shares into Prairie's school system (see Figure 7).

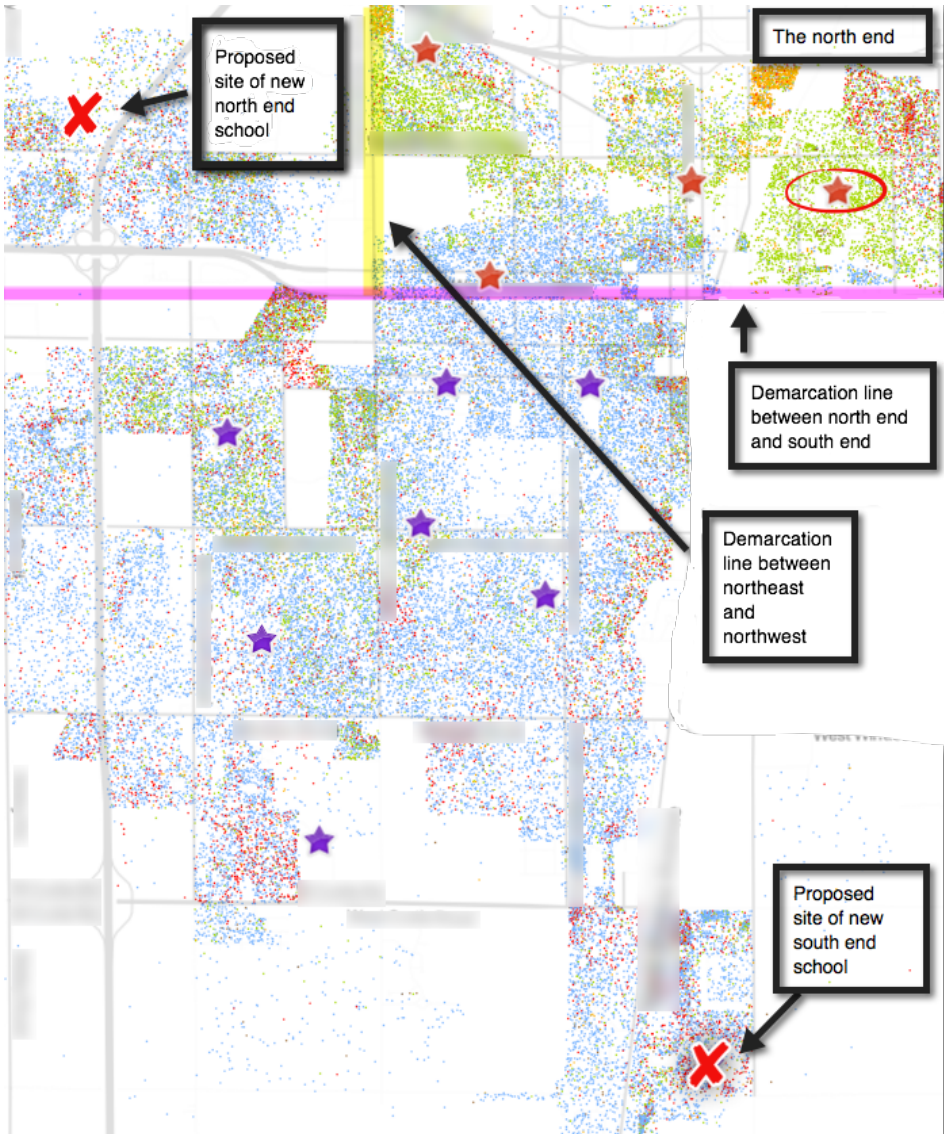

Figure 7. The proposed new sites for two new school buildings within Prairie school district. The red [X] shows the proposed location of the new school. While being in the north end of town, it was outside the Black northeast end of town. Purple stars represent elementary schools located in the south end of town and the orange stars represent the north end elementary schools. Robert Smalls is circled. Borders separating north from south and northwest from northeast are in purple and yellow, respectively. Green dots represent the Black population, blue dots represent the white population, red dots represent the Asian population, and orange dots represent the Hispanic population.

White community members (i.e., white resident, white board member) argued that the northwest location, specifically, met the requirements of the consent decree since it was located in the north side of town. It did not matter where in the north end the school was located.

> A federal consent decree requires only that the school board add two strands of classrooms north of [name] Avenue. It does not require that the new school (or an addition to an existing school) be located within [Prairie's] African-American community. Thus, the site in [the northwest subdivision] satisfies the consent decree (Local Newspaper, 2006).[33]

White residents further argued that this was not a matter of race, rather the northwest location was a matter of efficiency and being good stewards of public resources. The northwest location was also about supply and demand as well as feasibility as shown in the quote below.

> The traditionally black neighborhood of north and northeast [Prairie] is not growing. Building more classroom space there – while other parts of [Prairie] are expanding – would be wasteful and inefficient (Local Newspaper, 2006).[34]

For Black activists, however, the northwest site was simply unacceptable, a non-starter, and a betrayal to the Black community. Described below is a description of the meeting when the board, knowing well the criticisms from the Black community, chose to continue its support of the northwest site within the newer, whiter, housing subdivisions in northwest Prairie.

> In a stunning about-face Friday that infuriated an already angry black community, [Prairie] school officials advised board members to stick with the site they picked Monday for a new northwest [Prairie] school (Local Newspaper, 2006).

Black activists and the Plaintiff's attorneys argued that placing a school in the northwest corner of town did not meet the spirit and intent of the consent decree in addressing Black educational concerns. As the local newspaper described, the board meeting both stunned and angered the

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[33] White resident. Quotes from locally sourced documents are cited as the "local newspaper" with the appropriate year in order to protect the welfare, rights, and privacy of human subjects as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

[34] White Board Member of Prairie School District

Black community present at that time. Even though the proposed school site was geographically located in the north end, the lack of consideration in addressing Black grievances when deciding on the new school location, reopened past wounds of educational discrimination against Black children in the school district. As the Black activists noted below, many in the Black community felt that this proposal was unjust and unfair as two brand new schools would be placed in white majority areas.

> The bottom line is, we're proposing to build two new state-of-the-art schools in the confines of white neighborhoods. Black families are walking away empty-handed (Local Newspaper, 2006).[35]

The same activist, quoted in the newspaper excerpt above, also gave a talk in the community during this time period, which I attended. At this public gathering, the Black female community activist discussed the history behind schooling in Prairie. She stated that the majority of additional elementary buildings built within Prairie were built in the south end of town. When it came time to rebuild a north end school in the late 1990s, the community rejected two referendums, which sought the funds needed to build a new school in the north end.

In her opinion, many white residents balked at a new north end school, citing that the tax base was already too high. However, the third referendum passed, which doubled the cost, as a new school located in the south end was added to the referendum (see table 7 below). The final referendum had a cost of 21.6 million which was double the cost of the 1993 and 1994 referendum which just sought a new north end school.

[35] Black female community activist

Table 7[36]

Three Referendums Pertaining to New Elementary School Construction in Prairie

	Yes	No	Pass or Fail
1993 Referendum New north end elementary building (11.3M bond)	4,933	5,294	Fail
1994 Referendum New north end elementary building (10.5M bond)	5,808	6,591	Fail
1997 Referendum New north and south end elementary building (21.6M bond)	6,529	3,391	Pass

The notion, therefore, that not building schools in Black neighborhoods made practical sense, in terms of meeting the demand of population growth as well as being good stewards of resources, was a veiled cover for white geographic and racial biases. The northwest location, was seen by the Black activists, as catering to white educational interests. Not giving the historic Black north end another school that was previously agreed to by the school board, was a personal betrayal for the Black activists as they remembered the referendums during the 1990s. As described during the public talk, the rejection of building a north end school during the first and second referendum (1990s) was a slap in the face to the Black community and the northwest site was another slap. South end schools were continually built for white neighborhoods while schools in Black neighborhoods were either delayed or rejected by the white residents of the community.

As mentioned before, in 2006, the referendum that offered two schools sites in predominantly white neighborhoods, felt like a betrayal that opened old wounds for Black activists who lived through the referendums during the 1990s.

[36] Data retrieved from the Prairie County Clerk Records

> The community feels betrayed. Apparently the board is more comfortable betraying the black community than the other people in the district who are going to get two new state-of-the-art schools in their neighborhoods (Local Newspaper, 2006).[37]

As the quote above describes, for many Black residents in the community, the issue of the northwest site was considered "cozying up"[38] to white interests who benefited from these two school sites within their neighborhoods. Even when the Black superintendent defended the board's decision, below, the damage was already done. The two school sites were seen as benefiting the white community more than the Black community.

> I care about our kids. I'm a poor boy from a ghetto. I know how it is. I've been there. As superintendent, I think Monday's recommendation is a good decision for everyone. To change now will cost us trust, will destroy trust from parents all over the district. Our needs are so great, to make any other decision would be irresponsible (Local Newspaper, 2006).[2]

In this instance, while the superintendent does not name which parents will lose trust in the district, but clearly it is not referring to the many Black parents at the board meeting who felt betrayed. For Black activists, the northwest location was a ploy to benefit white families at the cost of the Black community getting a brand new school in their neighborhood. The northwest site appeased white families who dominated the housing in the northwest area and provided the school district with another highly sought after school rather than investing in a school that would continually struggle with the enrollment of white families. Voters soundly voted against the referendum by a 2:1 margin, where 64% voted no and only 36% voted yes. Eventually a referendum was passed without the northwest location being an option for a new schools site.

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[37] Another Black Activist

[38] Terminology used in the same newspaper article

Instead, Robert Smalls was torn down and rebuilt with additional capacity to meet the needs of the historic Black north end of town.

Race and geography matter. When thinking about race and the battle for where new schools should be built within Prairie, there were competing interests between the white and Black community. As a Black school board member noted, the issues of white spatial preferences based on racial makeup of schools was an issue that was front and center.

> We're seeing white families leave, and that's not in the best interests of African American students, [Black Board Member] said. I want to help white families stay in the district, but to make our decisions in ways to draw white families back is naive. They're not leaving because of buildings. They're leaving because there are too many black kids in class with their kids (Local Newspaper, 2006).[39]

This quote from the Black Board Member plainly described a major issue within the district regarding schooling options: the continued threat of white flight due to racial biases white parents have about Black children. The issue was not about outdated, older buildings. The issue was instead about who (Black students) were the majority in those buildings. The board member pointed to a long and sordid racial history within the town of Prairie between white and Black residents. The issue at hand was that white families did not want to send their children to a school that was majority Black. In Prairie, due to segregated housing, the geographic location of the school dictated the racial makeup of the student body. Schools in the northeast end were hard to integrate.

For white community members, their arguments for the northwest site location tried to remove the issue of race from the conversation. For this specific white resident, in the following

[39] Black school board member

quote, there was no racial duplicity or bias in the decision, rather the issue was that many schools already serviced the north end and were underused.

> The school board was not duplicitous, as some have charged, in voting to place a new school outside of the traditionally black community. There already are three elementary schools…in the traditionally African-American neighborhood[s]. Two of those schools already are underused (Local Newspaper, 2006).

This comment was a direct rebuttal to Black activists by claiming that race had nothing to do with a northwest location. The evidence provided was that schools were already present in north end schools and they were underutilized. What is left out of this conversation is why the schools were underutilized when south end schools were not. The underuse of these elementary schools in the north end were tied to racial biases of white families against schools with Black majorities situated in the northeast end of town. It was not simply a matter of supply and demand as this next white resident alludes to in the following comment.

> It makes sense to put the school in a growing area. 'It's accessible.' 'It's not in the heart of the African-American community, but it's easy to integrate. We're having a hard time integrating schools like [Robert Smalls] that are in the heart of the [African American] community. It makes sense to put a new school where we can fill it and integrate it easily' (Local Newspaper, 2006).[40]

The argument, in the above excerpt, was that a school in the northwest area would be much easier to integrate and was aligned with the school district's goal of desegregation. If so, the best option was to build the school on a site that would not scare away white families. A northwest site within a predominantly white subdivision would be easy to integrate. A win-win

[40] Local white resident

scenario. The problem with this argument, is that this type of integration would again place the busing burden back onto Black families. Black families would also be disadvantaged by sending their children to schools in white neighborhoods (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Bell, 2002).

Further, the idea that the school district should cater to white schooling preferences in order to aid integration, places both power and privilege in the hands of white families, perpetuating white dominance (Bell, 1987). In addition, the argument that catering to white interests, by choosing a school site in a majority white neighborhood, also benefited Black interests by way of easy integration, points to Derrick Bell's (1987) interest convergence theory, where Black interests are only taken into consideration if they align with white interests. In this instance, what is good for the white community in the northwest location would also be good for the Black community because it would be easier to integrate than a school built on the northeast side. Black interests then were only taken into account when white residents saw benefits for themselves.

In this context of focusing on white residents' interests, the Black activists were not willing to step aside in their demands for state of the art schools within their community and geographic space. The activism that arose within the Black community helped defeat the 2006 referendum, convinced the district to abandon the northwest site, and completely rebuild Robert Smalls from the ground up. The struggle over geography and the implications and consequences of where schools are located was not lost on the Black activists. This new elementary school building then would still be in the historic Black northeast side of town and would be even larger than the previous building with more seats than before. The new building, with the additional capacity, would serve the Black neighborhood and the families that lived there for the foreseeable future. Without, the activists' voices (e.g., community activists, pastors, president of

the urban league, president of the local chapter of the NAACP) the northwest location may have passed, which would have played into white dominant interests over Black equity concerns.

Magnet Program and Gifted Services at Robert Small

Purpose and use of magnet programs. As Ladson-Billings, Tate (1995), Lomotey and Staley (1990) describe, when attempting to desegregate schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods, magnet solutions used to entice white families into these schools were not aimed at necessarily rectifying educational inequality for Black students as much as providing additional curricular offerings for white families. In Prairie, the purpose in providing additional curricular offerings in only north end schools was to cater to white curricular interests and to provide additional value, hoping to entice white families to enroll (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2011/2013; Scott, 2011; McDermott, DeBray, & Frankenberg, 2012; Orfield & Reardon, 1994). Also, since magnet programs could be applied and used in many different ways, depending on the local needs within a community, critically analyzing Prairie district's use and purposes of these programs is necessary in order to better understand the potential of magnet programs in addressing equity concerns for students of color (Blank, Levine, & Steel, 1996). As the analysis in this chapter already presented, racial biases manifested in geographical preferences of schools in the district, which then shaped where and for what purpose magnet reforms were implemented within Prairie.

After the failed referendum of a new school in the northwest location in 2006, a new plan was drafted and approved by voters. In this approved referendum, Robert Smalls would be completely rebuilt and an additional school would be constructed in the adjoining village southeast of Prairie. The requirements of the consent decree in adding additional north end seats were satisfied and the Black activists in the community were successful in getting the school

district to rebuild a school in the historic Black community. While the geographical location of the southwest school would not deter white families from enrolling there, Robert Smalls in the northeast posed a major hurdle for the district in attracting white families, who mostly lived in the south end of town. However, given the judicial decision from *Parents Involved v. Seattle*, the school district could no longer use race as the sole assigning factor. So, the only option remaining was to somehow draw out white parents from their economically and homogeneous neighborhoods by using innovative academic programming that would address the racial bias against Robert Small's geographic location in the north end.

Prairie school district, therefore, tried to attune to white educational interests by implementing a district sought magnet initiative in north end schools, like STEM programming at Robert Smalls, which was highly sought after by community members. The magnet programs were used, by Prairie school district, to reinvent north end schools by making them more palatable for white families who lived in the majority white south and northwest portions of town. This acknowledgement that white families had to be catered to was reinforced also by the federal judge overseeing Prairie's consent decree. His opinion from the bench was quoted by the local newspaper as supporting Prairie's use of magnet curricular programming in deterring white families from leaving the district by incentivizing schools.

> [The federal judge] said the district and plaintiffs need to prove the families who are leaving wrong. "You have the talent to make those white people opting out want to opt in," he said. "This ought to encourage you people to put educational programs here in this district to make all those people running away beg you to let them come back" (Local Newspaper, 2016).

From the court's point of view, educational programs had the power to change people's minds about schools in the district. These programs could also provide so much value that not only would white families return to the district, but they would regret their decision of leaving in the first place. This charge was a tall order for Prairie. The federal judge also continued his defense of seeing education as a commodity (Orfield, 2013) by also tackling the issue of under chosen north end schools within Prairie.

> Controlled Choice is predicated upon open competition between schools for students. Schools with better academic programs will naturally draw more students than those with inferior academic programs. This, in turn, offers an incentive for underperforming schools to upgrade their curricula, staff, and facilities to compete with their brethren. To assist, under-chosen schools, the District has committed to provide resources to facilitate school improvement. The net result is a continuous cycle of competition and improvement in the overall quality of education as students are granted access to high quality schools outside their immediate neighborhood area (Court Opinion, 2002).[41]

From the opinion above, the issue of segregated schooling within Prairie, due to under chosen north end schools by the white community was a quality-related issue not solely a racially motivated issue for the court. Thus, the solutions to segregated schools were market-oriented reforms where schools were viewed as a commodity that parents chose based on the value that different programs or offerings at each school site offered (Orfield, 2013). If north end schools had better academic offerings, they would be more competitive with south end schools and parents would send their kids to those schools. However, this commodity view of education did not adequately account for the racial bias that north end schools faced in the community,

[41] Federal Judge

even with additional or enhanced curricular programming. In 2015 and 2016, data from the district continued to show that even with newly built schools and the addition of magnet programs, the Black student population at Robert Smalls was still the majority at the school (see Table 6). Not enough white families found the incentives attractive enough to enroll their children into Robert Smalls and the other north end schools (Table 6). So even with compelling and high quality educational programs, such as a STEM magnet, could not undue the racial bias white families had with Black majority north end schools.

Purpose and use of gifted programs. While magnet programs were not able, in Prairie, to fully desegregate north end schools, self-contained gifted programs were effective in attracting non-Black families to the school. The self-contained gifted program guaranteed a separate classroom for gifted students, who were majority non-Black, from the general education classrooms that were a majority Black. Within Prairie, gifted services were also seen by the district as an acceptable program that had prior success in attracting white families into north end schools. During an email exchange with the assistant superintendent[42] in charge of gifted services in 2015, she confirmed the district's use of gifted education in north end schools as a way to attract white families. Thus, the use of gifted services in the aforementioned ways was readily known, accepted, and supported by district officials and was also reinforced by the federal judge in charge of overseeing the consent decree. In the consent decree opinion, the federal judge wrote the following:

> The existence of special gifted programs in the north side schools offers an example of how certain programs can voluntarily draw non-African American students to north side

[42] The assistant superintendent is new to this role in 2014. The previous executive director for equity and excellence left becoming a superintendent in another state and the director of gifted education retired.

schools. By strengthening the academic programs offered, north side schools can offer compelling reasons for students, both African-American and white, to choose their facilities (Court Opinion, 2002).[43]

According to the federal judge, gifted education in north side schools was justified as a compelling reason for both Black and white families to send their children to Robert Smalls and to the other north side schools. However, this use and promotion of self-contained gifted services benefited non-Black families the most, since the majority of students in the program were white and Asian.

Furthermore, the enrollment of Black students in gifted services continued to decline after the resolution of the consent decree in 2009 as shown in Table 8 below. In 2012, only 35 Black students were enrolled in all of the self-contained gifted classrooms offered by the school district and the enrollment continued to decrease past 2012.

Table 8

Number of Students Enrolled in Gifted Classes in Prairie School District

	2009	2010	2011	2012
White enrollment	122	128	101	104
Asian enrollment	96	87	104	113
Black enrollment	48	60	40	35
Hispanic enrollment	24	23	20	19
Total Gifted Enrollment	291	298	267	288

In the fall of 2014, the Education, Equity, Excellence (EEE) committee[44] met and the new assistant superintendent in charge of gifted education showed three prior years of data (i.e., 2014, 2013, 2012) for gifted programming. This data showed a drop in Black admission to gifted

[43] Federal judge

[44] Prairie school district created the (EEE) Committee, as ordered by the courts, and accepted applications from community members who wanted to be part of receiving monthly updates and helping to monitor race based equity issues that persisted in the school district

classrooms and in the meeting, she noted that only 27 Black students were enrolled in 2014 which was a decrease from the 35 Black students that were enrolled in 2012 (education, equity, and excellence meeting minutes, 2014).

These consistently lower number of Black students in self-contained gifted might not have been an equity issue if they were adequately represented within the entire student body. However, as Table 9 shows, Black students were underrepresented in the gifted program when compared to the school district's racial demographics.

Table 9

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Gifted Compared to the District by Race

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of White students enrolled in all gifted classes	42%	43%	38%	36%
Percentage of White students enrolled in Prairie District	46%	44%	42%	41%
Percentage of Asian students enrolled in all gifted classes	33%	29%	39%	39%
Percentage of Asian students enrolled in Prairie District	10%	10%	9%	10%
Percentage of Black students enrolled in all gifted classes	16%	20%	15%	12%
Percentage of Black students enrolled in Prairie District	37%	38%	36%	35%
Percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in all gifted classes	8%	8%	7%	7%
Percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in Prairie District	7%	7%	8%	9%

In Table 9, after the resolution of the consent decree in 2009, instead of seeing a smaller gap between the Black gifted population and the Black student population, the gap persisted. In 2009, the gap was at 21% between Black gifted and the Black student population enrolled in the school district. In 2012, this same gap increased to 23%. This underrepresentation of the Black gifted population was much higher than the white and Hispanic gifted populations. The White and Hispanic gifted population when compared with the overall student population differed in the single digits. Asians were consistently overrepresented on average of 20 or more percentage points. This racial makeup of the gifted population within the district was also consistent of the

5th grade gifted class at Robert Smalls, where the majority were white and Asian students compared to the two general education classrooms that were a majority Black.

This racial dynamic of gifted classrooms was pertinent to the social dynamics in the 5th grade at Robert Smalls. Placing self-contained gifted classrooms to attract non-Black families to Robert Smalls created a racial juxtaposition between the gifted and general education classrooms that reverberated into the Black focal participants' lived experiences within the school setting. While the participants in this study spent most of the curricular day within their general education classrooms, during the STEM time the gifted and general education classrooms worked together. Thus, having a majority non-Black gifted classroom interacting with a Black majority general education classroom, produced a series of interactions based on the students' race, backgrounds, cultures, and positioning within the school setting.

Conclusion

The success of market oriented programs (e.g., STEM magnet, self-contained gifted) in reforming segregated schools can vary widely based on the local ways in which these programs are enacted (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013). For Prairie school district, the purpose and use of magnet and gifted programs at Robert Smalls must be critically examined in order to determine whether or not these programs benefited children of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), as magnet programs often purport to do (Betts, 2006; Bifulco, Cobb & Bell, 2004; Gamoran, 1996; Silver, Saunders, & Zarate 2008). In Prairie city, the racialized local context also provided valuable insight into a segregated community in which schools located in the Black north end was discriminated against by white families who lived in the south end of town. This geographic divide and consequence (Soja, 2010) played into schooling preferences as white families did not want to send their children to Black majority schools in the north end. Therefore, the school

district's use of magnet and gifted programs in order to attract white families to Robert Smalls was important because these programmatic decisions infringed on how Black students accessed and experienced STEM learning activities.

In addition, the school district's long history of catering to white interests over Black concerns regarding a fair and equal education mattered to this study. The school district's view that STEM and gifted programs would benefit both white and Black interests equally should be interrogated. This interrogation of who benefits most from these programs is supported by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), as they argue that racism is embedded within every American institution, therefore, it is necessary to challenge the "traditional claims that educational institutions make toward…race neutrality and equal opportunity" (p.26). These traditional claims by the school district that magnet and gifted programs would benefit Black students at Robert Smalls by promoting desegregation, must be analyzed through CRT in order to expose the continued ways that structural racism continues to persist, even in public schools undergoing a magnet reform.

To highlight the structural racism embedded within schools by catering programs to white interests is further explained and explored in chapters five and six. In chapter five, incorporating a magnet program that was focused on attracting white families, had consequences on Black student learning as teacher's prioritized magnet related constraints instead of addressing the learning and social needs of the Black participants within the STEM setting. Ignoring the needs of the Black male participants then prevented them from being able to experience the STEM learning opportunity in its entirety, which contributed to inequitable access for Black student participants. In chapter six, the placement of a self-contained gifted program within Robert Smalls had consequences of supporting a social hierarchy by labeling one class as

gifted and the other class (general education class) as non-gifted by default. This social hierarchy played out in the STEM projects as students battled over who could lead and make decisions and who had the knowledge required to make those decisions. Due to this racialized social hierarchy, gifted students infringed on the leadership opportunities available for the Black participants' as well as denying their contributions to the group design. Together, chapters five and six present the continued inequalities that persisted for Black student participants even after the addition of magnet and gifted programs. The story, however, does not end there. Equally presented in chapters five and six, is evidence that shows the strength and resilience of Black students as they advocated for themselves, despite the continued structural inequalities that were ingrained within Robert Smalls.

CHAPTER 5: BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITHIN A STEM MAGNET PROGRAM

The STEM magnet program at Robert Smalls was designed and implemented as a way to address the racial and geographic biases within the city of Prairie. As described in the previous chapter, the geography of Prairie had "embedded injustices" (Soja, 2010) where white families did not want to send their children to Black majority schools in the north end of town. These racial biases by white families were common in school districts with segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools (Orfield, 2013). Because of these racial biases, the school district implemented a magnet program that they believed would counter the discrimination against Robert Smalls. The magnet employed a STEM curricular addition that catered to white educational interests with the view that white families would choose to access these programs and put aside their biases. The STEM program at Robert Smalls was thus implemented as a way to change the image of the school and make it more appealing to white parents.

Catering to white curricular interests, however, is deeply problematic. As Ladson-Billings (1998) argued from a CRT perspective, "whites have been the primary beneficiaries of Civil Rights Legislation" including magnet programs (p.1). Therefore, the continued practice of catering magnet programs to white interests allows for a system that perpetually gives the primary benefit to white families and supports white dominance. The question of who benefits the most from a magnet program is still relevant in today's educational climate where magnet programs are still used to address racial biases against Black majority schools (Orfield, 2013). Also, structuring magnet programs that make white families the "primary beneficiaries," continues to deprioritize and devalue Black students' needs within the school setting (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), as evidenced in this chapter. Therefore, in order to push for the

reprioritization of Black needs, the experiences of the Black student participants should take center place (Bell, 2004; Dixon, Rousseau Anderson, & Donnor, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) in order to counter the district's claim that magnet programs were beneficial in addressing the continued racialized inequalities at Robert Smalls.

Also, by placing Black students' experiences at the center of analysis, their experiences "provide important insights into the ways that schools structure inequality" (Dixon & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Black student experiences shed light on the structural inequalities that played out in implementing the magnet program. For example, evidence is later provided that shows the way that magnet constraints (e.g., time constraints, teacher evaluation of on task behavior, and ignoring group conflicts for the sake of time) based on a program designed for white curricular interests, limited Black students' opportunities to engage fully in the STEM activities. At the same time, Black students' resistance towards these magnet constraints exposed the continued inequalities experienced by Black children within public schools as well.

Andrew's Experiences that Challenge Traditional Claims of the STEM Program Offering Equal Opportunities to all Students

> We really have today, we can't guarantee tomorrow for you. So you should at this step be sketching in your step four section...and you should be talking as a team about your inputs and outputs so you are super-duper ready to label them on your poster...today you have to be super on task. If you are not on task, then you might not be able to get it done and that will be really sad (Mrs. Mohr, Audio Recording, October 26, 2015).

The excerpt above is characteristic of the instructions that Mrs. Mohr would give before students separated to work on their STEM projects at Robert Smalls. Her talk above emphasized specific magnet constraints that focused on saving instructional time, as well as behavioral

expectations (i.e., "talking as a team," being "super on task") that teachers believed were necessary for the completion of the STEM projects. These constraints were consequences of catering to white dominant interests. White families had to be convinced to attend Robert Smalls through the use of specialized curricular programs. Catering to these interests, as Bell (2004) notes, continued to benefit a racial hierarchy in which white people were at the top. Because of the additional STEM curricula, the teachers felt constrained to enact these time limits on the students as they worked on the magnet related projects.

As shown in the next two data points, these magnet constraints prevented teachers from adequately addressing the needs that came up as the Black participants engaged in the STEM activities. The teachers' prioritization of the magnet related time constraints over the needs of Black students represented the engrained forms of racism as they were more intent on implementing a specialized program that benefited white families rather than addressing the Black student needs as they arose in the class space. Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2017) discuss the importance and necessity of naming and explaining these structural forms of racism that persist in schools for children of color. These forms of structural racism are also explained further through Andrew's experiences in the following data sets.

Andrew's experiences and exclusion from the STEM activity. During the Mission 5 activity, Andrew (Black male participant, general education), Jacoby (Black male participant, general education), Madelyn (white female, gifted) and Yaasir (white male, gifted) were working together in the Greenhouse group. They were assigned to work in Ms. Stuart's (general education teacher) room. Each group was assigned to a specific task that was needed to sustain life on the spaceship (refer to chapter three for details about Mission 5). The Greenhouse group was in charge of providing the necessary biomes to produce the food needed on the return journey

home. As I observed this group over several weeks, a recurring issue within the group was that there were many different design ideas. These ideas would often conflict with one another requiring the group to make a decision on which idea to put on the schematic design. Andrew took the design seriously and persisted in his attempts to have his ideas heard by his peers. However, Andrew's persistence in his ideas prompted Ms. Stuart to remind the class that there was no time for all this deliberation and argument since time was limited.

> "Okay, students in my classroom, give me five now. Students in my classroom, your eyes are on me, your hand is in the air, and your mouth is shut. I'll wait. Fix it fifth graders. You know what give me five looks like. [pause] Now, you have 45 minutes to be done with this project. We have no time to be messing around. So once you feel that you and your group are done sketching, you come and you show me your sketch and then I will let you go get a poster board. On that poster you are to be sketching with pencil first, then I will give you markers" (Ms. Stuart, Audio Transcript, October 26, 2015).

In this excerpt, Ms. Stuart makes it clear that there was "no time to be messing around." However, the students were not messing around. Andrew was in a deep discussion with his peers even to the point of arguing, in order to convey his ideas about how he thought the schematic should be designed. Ms. Stuart instead of addressing Andrew's needs within his group to have his ideas heard, continued to push the view that time was limited and the students needed to complete tasks rather than "mess" around. A CRT framework helps us understand these time constraints as a form of institutional racism that is based on white privilege in having magnet programs structured for their specific needs. This prioritization of magnet constraints over Andrew's socio-emotional learning needs points to the structural racism within institutional practices (Gillborn, 2016). In the next data excerpt, I continue to focus on Andrew's experience,

which is consistent with CRT's tenet of centering Black students' experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge.

Witnessing little change in the group's discussion, Ms. Stuart approaches the Greenhouse group and asks, "How is it going?" Yaasir (white male, gifted classroom) answers, "Terrible. Everyone is arguing." (Audio Transcript, October 26, 2015). Madelyn (white female, gifted classroom) responded to Ms. Stuart's inquiry by asking the group members, "Are we all in agreement? Raise your hand if you like our design." As she began counting the hands raised, Andrew shouted out, "I ain't even seen it" (Fieldnote, October 26, 2015), referring to the schematic design. Madelyn ignores Andrew and continues to count the hands raised. As she does, Andrew gets louder shouting in frustration, "What are we doing? WHAT ARE WE DOING? Oh my God" (Audio Recording, October 26, 2015). Ms. Stuart then calls his name and pulls him aside. Instead of taking the time to address Andrew's concerns, Ms. Stuart in the following fieldnote continues to reiterate to Andrew that time was limited and he would have to go along with the group because there was not enough time.

> I watched Andrew get more and more frustrated as his peers, Madelyn and Yaasir, tried to take over the group proceedings by pushing their design elements and taking votes on whether people agreed or not with a particular addition. Even though Andrew did not raise his hand in agreement with a specific design component, if a majority of the group raised their hands, Madelyn moved on to the next component no matter who complained or disagreed. Andrew having to make a decision of whether or not to support the final schematic sketch, had enough of the group decision making process. He shouted out in frustration, "What are we doing!" as a way to disagree with the how the group was deciding what to include and exclude in the final design. Ms. Stuart pulled Andrew over

> to her desk hearing his frustration, and began a conversation with him. Andrew kept repeating, "I don't know what we are doing." Ms. Stuart not being able to calm Andrew down or respond to his exclusion by Madelyn and Yaasir, tells him that he has 30 minutes left and sent him back to his group (Fieldnote, October 26, 2015).

Bell (2004) argues that CRT allows us to see the ways racism is both ordinary and normal within everyday society. From this lens, we see how racism is normalized in this everyday STEM activity. Ms. Stuart's focus and priority—from her first talk with the entire class to her individual conversation with Andrew—has been on the students finishing the Mission 5 project in time for parent teacher conferences. The time constraints and need to market the STEM program within the community are all efforts to appease and attract white families. In this way, we see how the ordinary event of Ms. Stuart focusing on these other issues (instead of Andrew's learning needs) is actually a prioritization of white families' interests over those of Black students. In this event, therefore, racism and white supremacy were institutionalized within everyday learning practices as white interests superseded those of Black students.

CRT also points out that the existence of white supremacy perpetuates a system that marginalizes people of color (Bell, 2004). This is evident as we turn to Andrew's learning experience in Mission 5. Based on the time constraints set by Ms. Stuart, as well as the role in which he was relegated to by his gifted peers (a topic that chapter six is devoted to), Andrew was prevented from fully participating in the Mission 5 project. Andrew had limited access to group decision-making as his white gifted peers Madelyn and Yaasir dominated voting on the design of Mission 5, and ignored his demands to be included ("What are we doing!" and "I don't know what we are doing"). Conversely, we see Madelyn and Yaasir developing leadership skills, engaging in creative endeavors, and growing their scientific ideas about space and design. CRT

helps us understand Robert Smalls as an institution devoted to white interests. In this instance, Madelyn and Yaasir's learning experience was at the cost of Andrew's. Thus, we see how prioritization of white interests is more than a benefit to white families, but it is also a cost to Black families and their children. In this way, CRT illuminates the ways white supremacy within everyday institutionalized practices are harmful to Black students in schools. The data excerpt above shows us the harm Andrew endures within a school that prioritizes white students' learning needs at the expense of their Black peers.

Further evidence of white supremacy at Robert Smalls is the way in which Andrew exercises his agency within the Greenhouse group. His frustration is a response to something—his gifted peers and Ms. Stuart—people who enact priorities aligned to white interests. Andrew's response further points to the inequity taking place in the event described above. Within a CRT framework, Andrew's experiences if taken as a "source of knowledge" present a first-hand account that acts as a counternarrative to the school district's argument that magnet programs benefit everyone at the school. Andrew's behavior might initially be seen as disruptive, however, his frustration in not being included on the group project and being ignored by Ms. Stuart when he complained, points to the continued ways that the needs of Black students are set aside. Thus, Andrew's agency illuminates how traditional claims by school districts of providing equal opportunities to all children in schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) is countered through his agency of being frustrated and ignored. In order to dismantle this institutional racism embedded at Robert Smalls, STEM magnet needs to be reoriented from a specialized program designed to help desegregate the school, to a program in which time is built in to specifically listen and address Black students' concerns and frustrations.

Andrew's needed more time to work on Mission 5. Towards the end of Mission 5, I had the chance to observe and watch Andrew (Black male participant, general education) work with his two other partners Anthony, (Black male, general education), and Michael (white male, general education) as they were transferring their Greenhouse schematic design to a large poster board.

Mrs. Mohr:	Okay. Mrs. Canaan's group, it's time to move on back to her room please.
Andrew:	Wait, wait, wait...
Anthony:	I'm not in Mrs. Canaan's class.
Andrew:	I'm not in Mrs. Canaan... [softer voice]
Michael:	[interrupting Andrew] Yes you are.
Andrew:	Be quiet! Be quiet!
Michael:	Yes, you are.
Andrew:	You talk too much. Be quiet!
	[Teacher Aide overheard the discussion]
Teacher Aide:	Andrew?
Andrew:	Hmm?
Teacher Aide:	Which class are you in?
	[Andrew is silent for a moment]
Andrew:	[Softly] Mrs. Canaan's.
Female student:	[Shouts] Canaan's!
Andrew:	I just said it, dang!
Teacher Aide:	I suggest you move on back.

Andrew: I gotta put, I gotta put something on…[inaudible] Where did she [Madelyn] put the inputs and outputs stuff?

Teacher Aide: She requested, if you are in Mrs. Canaan's class, Anthony...

Anthony: I'm not, I'm in Ms. Stuart's.

Teacher Aide: Okay. What class are you? [Pointing to a female in another group.]

Female student: Stuart.

[Andrew continues to work on the schematic design, the teacher's aide continues to tell Andrew to go back to his class.]

Andrew: I AM!

Teacher Aide: Well then show me that you are doing it. Don't say "I am" if you're not.

Andrew: Anthony!

Anthony: What?!

Andrew: Write the inputs and outputs.

Anthony: Okay. (Audio Recording, October 27, 2015)

In this example, Mrs. Mohr broke up the larger groups into smaller groups due the constant arguing between gifted and general education students. These smaller groups took turns working on the project separately. This new set up also meant that less time was given to each of the smaller groups when working on the schematic design. In this data point, Andrew chose to ignore Mrs. Mohr's request for all of Mrs. Canaan's students to return to her classroom. Instead Andrew remained behind. Eventually the teacher's aide found out that Andrew did not leave when he was supposed to and continued to push him to go ("I suggest you move on back"). Andrew, in response, tried to stay as long as he could, giving the teacher's aide a rationale for

why he had to stay ("I gotta put, I gotta put something on"). Andrew's decision to stay was interpreted by the teacher's aide as not following or obeying the directions given to him. However, from Andrew's perspective, he was finally able to contribute to the project without being stifled by Madelyn, and he wanted to take full advantage of it even though his time had run out.

Solórzano and Yosso (2016) argue within a CRT framework, that the experiential knowledge of people of color is necessary to challenge institutional claims of objectivity and equal opportunity. Based on this framework I argue that Andrew was not provided the same learning opportunities as his white peers. Andrew needed additional time to help compensate for being excluded by Madelyn and Yaasir from working on the schematic design. Providing the same amount of time for each smaller group to work on the project might look on the surface as equal opportunity for all students. However, because his gifted peers excluded him from working on the project, giving him the same time as everyone else did not properly address Andrew's past exclusion. Not considering Andrew's need for more time to work on the project perpetuated a system of white dominance in which Andrew did not receive equal opportunities to contribute or experience STEM content. Therefore, Andrew's experiences with not being given enough time to equally work on the project as his white peers counters the traditional claims made by the school district that magnet programs benefit Black students and provide equal opportunities. Furthermore, Mrs. Mohr on other occasions talked about how it was only fair to give equal time to all the groups and that no group should get more than the other. However, giving each smaller group the same time did not account for the inequalities that Andrew faced when his gifted peers denied him the opportunity to contribute to his group project.

CRT also values the experiences of people of color as first-hand accounts that are legitimate, valuable, and point out structural forms of racism embedded within schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). Andrew's explanation and rationale, was a form of his agency, as he resisted leaving the project without completing his tasks of writing the inputs and outputs. Andrew's push to find the inputs and outputs and write them on the poster board provided a counternarrative to the teacher aide's assertion that Andrew was purposefully disobedient ("Well then show me that you are doing it. Don't say "I am" if you're not"). Andrew's actions and words show that he had important work to complete that necessitated him staying longer to work on the project. His reminder to Anthony while he was leaving also counters the teacher aide's view that he was simply being disobedient and not following directions. In fact, Andrew was overly committed to the STEM project and wanted to make sure that at that time when he was free to work on the project without interference, he wanted to stay as long as possible. The teacher aide's claim that Andrew was being dishonest should not be the narrative that describes Andrew's behavior. Instead Andrew's actions and resilience challenge the notion that he was given an equal amount of time as his white peers.

Jacoby's Experiences As Integral to Better Understanding Racial Inequality

CRT asserts that "the experiential knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and an integral part to analyzing and understanding racial inequality" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 16). In this section, Jacoby's "experiential knowledge" at Robert Smalls is legitimate and provides a useful lens in better understanding and addressing racial inequality embedded within the STEM program at Robert Smalls. Because the STEM magnet was designed as a curricular add on in order to meet white educational interests, the time allotted for STEM projects was limited, which also influenced how teachers evaluated student behavior. The time constraints put

a premium on groups staying on task in order to complete the assigned STEM projects. Therefore, any behavior that was seen as off task, from the teacher's perspective, was met with consequences (e.g., leave the group and do a math worksheet). Teachers evaluated students' participation in the STEM activity by categorizing if they were on task or off task. If the students were working well together and progressing on the assignment, their behavior was considered to be on task. Other behaviors such as talking out of turn, being too loud, not working on the assigned project, or arguing with peers were evaluated as off task behavior.

This labeling of students as on task or off task did not take into account or value the experiences of students of color as CRT argues for. Instead, the behavior labels perpetuated a system of catering to white privilege. The district's racial desegregation goals for the STEM magnet at Robert Smalls filtered down into how teachers evaluate students within the classroom. They did not listen to what Jacoby had to say or value his experiences and complaints as he worked alongside his peers on the STEM project. Instead, the teacher's aide evaluated Jacoby's adherence to the school's definition of being on task (that focused more on completion of the STEM activities), rather than on Jacoby's needs. Completing the STEM activity had tangible benefits for the school district as Mission 5 would be presented in the hallways during parent teacher conferences, showcasing to the community the STEM projects at the school. The benefit the school district received from showcasing the completed STEM projects was prioritized over Jacoby's needs. Through a CRT lens, this prioritization of the school district's magnet goals in having an attractive STEM program they could showcase instead of addressing Jacoby's needs (presented in this section) points to racist institutional practices that cared more about the image transformation at Robert Smalls than the needs of Black students like Jacoby.

In the following data point, Jacoby (Black male participant, general education) was having a discussion with Aiden (Black male, general education) about his experiences working with Madelyn (white female, gifted) and Yaasir (white male, gifted) as they worked together on the schematic design. The data is presented in an integrative style where their speech is directly incorporated into the narrative retelling instead of in a separate excerpt like previous examples. This integrative style allows for Jacoby's experiences and resilience to be highlighted as a source of knowledge that countered the institutional label of being off task that was assigned to him by the teacher's aide.

Jacoby's experiences towards the teacher's evaluation of his behavior. Towards the end of Mission 5, Mrs. Mohr divided the larger groups into smaller groups and had them rotate as they worked on the schematic design. She stated to me that the groups were too large and therefore inefficient; making them smaller allowed the groups to be more productive in a shorter amount of time. Jacoby was in one of the smaller groups working on the Greenhouse schematic poster board during his rotation. I watched Jacoby and his partners coloring and making adjustments to the poster board while simultaneously talking about their group dynamics when they all worked on it together. In their smaller group, they complained openly about the gifted students and how they tried to become the leaders and take control of the Greenhouse design.

Jacoby complained by stating that "[Madelyn and Yaasir] was barely letting us do anything" and that "Madelyn was acting like she was the freakin' leader" (Audio Recording, October 27, 2015). His experience here pointed to peer conflicts that prevented him from fully participating in the STEM activity. Aiden (Black male, general education student), who was in the same group, also talked about how he saw components of the schematic on the poster board that were not agreed upon by the entire group. Aiden complained, "I don't like that. They need to

ask the group if we all agree before they add it" (Audio Recording, October 27, 2015). At that same time, the teacher's aide while monitoring the room, circled around them and listened in on Jacoby's small group discussions several times. Toward the end of the time allotted, the teacher's aide made the following comment, "I am sure glad you guys can multitask because there is a lot of talking going on" (Audio Recording, 10.27.15). To which Jacoby quickly replied, "Yeah, we can multitask. So, yeah. We are all good" (Audio Recording, 10.27.15).

Since CRT honors Black students' experiences as sources of knowledge (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016), I argue that Jacoby's retelling of his experience is a valid source of knowledge. Jacoby's experience is integral in analyzing and understanding how racial inequality is embedded within the magnet programming at Robert Smalls. In this example, the teacher aide prioritized the institution's goal of project completion by evaluating Jacoby and Aiden's behavior as off task. She stated to them that there was "a lot of talking going on" which meant that they must be off task due to their talking. However, this evaluation was made with no consideration for what Jacoby was actually talking about. Jacoby was discussing the issues of access that he had while working on the project with his peers. Instead of evaluating Jacoby based on institutional goals and standards, his expression of frustration with being denied the chance to participate in the project should be valued and prioritized. However, the teacher's aide continued on by qualifying Jacoby's behavior as "multi-tasking" which was code for being off task. Her lack of care and interest in Jacoby's experiences of having less access to the STEM project continues to perpetuate unequal opportunities for Black students like Jacoby. As CRT argues, because racism is ordinary, pervasive, and endemic within society's institution (Bell, 2004), not prioritizing Jacoby's experiences within this context continues to support embedded inequalities in which Jacoby is marginalized.

Jacoby's agency in resisting and disagreeing with the teacher aide's evaluation of his behavior can also be seen as a challenge to the traditional view that schools have the best interest of students in mind, which is a core tenant of CRT. CRT challenges this traditional claim of schools looking out for the best interest of all students including students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). As this example shows, the teacher's aide who was an institutional agent did not have the best interest of Jacoby in mind when she evaluated his behavior. She prioritized the completion of the project, which benefited the school's showcase of the group's STEM work, instead of addressing Jacoby's complaints of being excluded from the project by his gifted peers. Jacoby's experiences of being excluded should be of more concern to the teacher's aide if the school truly looked out for the best interest of all students, including Black students at Robert Smalls. The cost to Jacoby's then was that his needs of being included in the group project were never acknowledged or addressed.

Attuning to Jacoby's experiences as legitimate and necessary in analyzing the inequalities he faced within the STEM setting at Robert Smalls (Bell, 2004) could have helped in addressing the problems experienced within the group setting. Jacoby needed support in making sure that his group did not exclude him from major design decisions. Rather than focusing on magnet behavioral constraints and evaluating them for being off task, if Jacoby and Aiden's experience were acknowledged, interventions could be used to help them negotiate the decision making process within their group. Also, based on Jacoby and Aiden's experiences, time had to be spent helping students navigate through their conflicts within the group decision making process. Focusing on the social roles and conflicts within the group setting could have created opportunities for Jacoby to effectively share his frustrations with Madelyn.

Based on the previous episodes, adding a magnet program to Robert Smalls did not automatically guarantee meaningful or equitable learning opportunities for Black students. Bell (2004) noted this when he argued that desegregation in itself does not mean that Black students receive a better education. Orfield (2013) also noted that choice systems and magnet programs (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013) do not on their own create better learning opportunities for Black children. Addressing Jacoby's experiences and needs within the STEM setting were important to consider, if the goal was to provide a meaningful and equitable learning experience for Black students within magnet related programs.

Jacoby experiences in advocating for his speaking rights. In this next data example, Jacoby (Black male participant, general education), Anthony (Black male, general education), Madelyn (white female, gifted) and Yaasir (white male, gifted) were working together on finishing their schematic design for the Greenhouse group. During this group time, both Jacoby and Anthony had major disagreements on design elements within their Greenhouse schematic and had difficulty reaching a consensus with their gifted peers. Madelyn and Yaasir had their own design ideas that they were not willing to part with. These arguments over which design elements should be drawn on the schematic went unresolved and members in the group tried to draw their own ideas without first getting everyone's approval, which led to many verbal confrontations. Ms. Stuart, heard these continued disagreements and interjected into the group process as described in the following fieldnote.

> Ms. Stuart responded to more disagreements in the Greenhouse group by telling the group from her desk that, "If you cannot work collaboratively, there are people in Mrs. Canaan's group that are working on a math packet. So if you can't function in this group, we have another activity for you." Within the group setting, there was a talking stick that

was implemented by the teachers to help the group members take turns speaking. However, even after Ms. Stuart gave an ultimatum, the group could not come together and agree on the different biomes needed on the schematic design. Right after Ms. Stuart finished her warning, Jacoby again tried to give his input to the group without the talking stick, and Ms. Stuart snapped her finger at him from her desk, showing it was not his turn. Then Anthony tried to talk out of turn without the talking stick and Ms. Stuart snapped her finger at him as well from her desk. The group members, after being corrected twice, started to wait until they received the talking stick to share their ideas to the group. The talking stick eventually made its way back to Madelyn and while speaking, she became frustrated because even though no one was interrupting her while she spoke, her peers were not paying attention to her. She asked the group, "Guys, is anyone listening?" At that time, Jacoby asked for his turn to speak by pointing to the talking stick. After seeing Jacoby's request, instead of handing the talking stick over, Madelyn began to repeat her ideas again, which prompted Jacoby to begin whistling as he ignored what Madelyn was saying. Ms. Stuart, hearing the whistling, got up from her desk, took Jacoby out of the group and out of her room, sat him down in Mrs. Canaan's room, and gave him a math worksheet to complete. After handing him the math sheet, Jacoby responded, "Why? What did I do?" Then he plopped himself down on the seat, slammed his binder down on the desk, and buried his head in his arms (Fieldnote, October 20, 2015).

CRT asserts and acknowledges "the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge" (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017, p. 34). CRT also talks of the importance of centering people of color's experiences in order to

expose the ways that racism and the inequalities persist (Ladson-Billings, 2013). At Robert Smalls, Jacoby's experiences interacting with Madelyn (white female, gifted) and with Ms. Stuart expose the ways in which magnet reform benefits white interests instead of Jacoby's needs. When Ms. Stuart stepped into the Greenhouse group, instead of taking the time to address Madelyn and Jacoby's peer conflict, she instead pushed magnet constraints of completing the project in time for parent-teacher conferences instead of listening to and taking Jacoby's issues seriously.

In this example, Jacoby's experiences also point to an educational system that is punitive rather than responsive to his needs. Removing Jacoby from the group meant that his behavior was interpreted through the institutional lens in which the completion of Mission 5, which represented the magnet adoption at Robert Smalls was valued more than Jacoby's expressed disagreement with Madelyn. This focus on STEM implementation based on institutional goals of implementing a specialized program to entice white families to the school by catering to their interests does not value Jacoby's needs within this setting. The institution may deem Jacoby's behavior as distracting and obstinate, however, CRT changes the lens in which Jacoby's behavior is assessed. Rather than assigning consequences based on whether Jacoby was compliant to Ms. Stuart's request of getting along with group mates, Jacoby's experience should take center place when addressing inequitable access to speak within the group setting. Doing so would have allowed Jacoby the chance to share why he refused to listen to Madelyn and come up with a way to address their peer conflict.

In addition, Jacoby's protest to Ms. Stuart was legitimate and should have been taken seriously. If Jacoby's experiences were valued, exploring why Jacoby was so upset would have been the next logical step based on Jacoby's act of protest. However, there was no time to

explore what needs Jacoby had in his group, he was removed and given a math sheet to work on. Jacoby's initial refusal to accept less than full participation shows a counternarrative to the dominant view that he was being disruptive and trying to prevent the group from making a decision. If the magnet priorities were instead centered on Black students' needs like Jacoby's, his whistling would be seen as an act of resistance displaying his dissatisfaction with the way that his group was making decisions and his disagreement with Madelyn excluding his voice from the group process, instead of as a disruptive behavior requiring his removal from the group and classroom.

Jacoby's turn to speak was being denied by Madelyn, and his response was to express his agency towards Madelyn in the form of whistling. This act of resistance expressed his unwillingness to go along with Madelyn's opinions and also expressed him wanting to share his own point of view. However, instead of Ms. Stuart using Jacoby's expression of agency as a gateway into addressing the underlying peer conflicts in the group, Jacoby was removed for being disruptive. This preference of institutional related goals over Jacoby's academic and non-academic needs continued to support a magnet reform centered on attracting white families to the school and not necessarily on Black student's needs. Focusing on Jacoby's resistance through a CRT lens, means that his actions in slamming the binder and his emphatic disagreement with being removed provides a counternarrative to Ms. Stuart's assessment that Jacoby was being disruptive for no other purpose than to stop the group from proceeding with the schematic design. Instead, acknowledging Jacoby's experience of being frustrated over the group decision making process, would have meant making time to address his conflict with Madelyn, instead of trying to force students to conform to behavioral expectations, that did not prioritize or address their social needs.

Conclusion

STEM magnet reform focused on attracting white families to Robert Smalls by catering to their curricular interests. This focus on white interests then influenced the way that STEM magnet was shaped and implemented within Robert Smalls. These implementation choices also then influenced the magnet related constraints and priorities seen throughout the STEM activities. As Gillborn (2016) notes, when magnet programs are designed based on white interests, the benefit to children of color must be critically examined. In the same way, Robert Small's magnet reform as enacted in the 5th grade setting focused more on institutional goals and values than on meeting the specific needs of Black students like Jacoby. Therefore, in this chapter Andrew and Jacoby's experiences were re-centered as the main source of knowledge as they interacted with peers and teachers. Their experiences exposed the ways that the district's institutional goals of implementing a specialized STEM program at Robert Smalls had inequitable outcomes for Black students like Jacoby and Andrew.

The adoption of magnet programs alone, without attention to the way they are implemented did not guarantee better learning opportunities for Black students as researchers like Orfield (2013) and Frankenberg (2013) have exposed. Therefore, the agency and experiences of Black students are crucial in better understanding the benefit of magnet programs in Black majority schools. By focusing on the main participants' agency expressed through their own priorities and interests, points to better understanding their academic and social needs within a magnet setting. Their needs, as Ladson-Billings (2013) argued, must be valued and recognized within the classroom and school setting in order to provide more meaningful STEM reform that supports and empowers Black students.

CHAPTER 6: GIFTED PROGRAMMING AND ITS ROLE IN BLACK STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Gifted programming was heralded by the federal judge overseeing the consent decree (in chapter four) as an example of a program that could keep white families from leaving the school district. Within the white community, the popularity of self-contained gifted was higher than most other programs. Therefore, Prairie school district implemented the gifted programs in all of the north end schools in an effort to entice white families. Using the gifted programming to cater to white interests in the gifted program exposed the ways in which institutions supported and extended white schooling interests (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In addition, exposing the way that institutions supported white schooling interests shows the ways in which racism is still embedded within U.S. institutions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016).

For example, gifted programming at Robert Smalls catered to white demands to keep the program in a self contained classroom. Prior to the STEM magnet, gifted programs were purposefully implemented in north end schools to attract white families into predominantly Black neighborhoods. When it came time to apply for funding various magnet programs, the school district tried to dissolve the self-contained gifted program since funding sources discouraged gifted programs that required testing for enrollment. However, once the community found out about the district's plan to dismantle the self-contained gifted classrooms, a strong backlash from white gifted parents ensued. The district eventually conceded to white demands in keeping the self-contained program. By doing so, they submitted to a system of white dominance (Bell, 2004) at the expense of children of color (as will be shown later in this chapter).

The progress of how these events unfolded are consistent with a CRT tenet that white

dominance is pervasive within society (Bell, 1987). This is evident in the white parents' views, which focused on making sure to keep separate classrooms for their gifted children to keep from integrating with the Black student majority. With the magnet reform underway, the school district's adherence to white parents' demands meant that white gifted students at Robert Smalls would benefit from both the STEM and gifted programs simultaneously. Conceding to white demands also contributed to a racialized social hierarchy among the students at Robert Smalls that disadvantaged the Black participants' opportunities to learn STEM content.

Noguera (2008) problematizes "gifted" programs by pointing out that if "some kids are gifted," then "some kids are giftless" (p. 1). This lens could also be applied to Robert Smalls' self-contained gifted classroom. CRT argues that racialized inequalities are embedded within American institutions because racism has a permanent role in U.S. society (Bell, 1987). Applying this principle to Robert Smalls exposes two layers of inequity embedded within the self-contained gifted. First, the introduction of institutionalized labels created a de facto distinction between gifted and general education students; general education students were not labeled as "gifted," and were thus assumed to be "not gifted" or "giftless." The second layer of inequity is the difference in the racial composition of gifted classrooms with majority white and Asian students, and the general education classrooms with majority Black students. From the combination of these two layers of inequity, a racialized hierarchy is formed with Black student participants at the bottom along with their knowledge, experiences, and contributions to STEM projects. The racialized hierarchy between gifted and general education students is seen through two major themes in this chapter. The first theme was the purposeful exclusion of the Black participants by their gifted peers. The second theme was the assignment of subordinate roles given to the Black participants by the gifted peers that further devalued their contributions and

participation.

Therefore, the experiences and agency of the Black student participants are important in exposing the structural forms of racism at Robert Smalls. As CRT argues, structural forms of racism are exposed when marginalized experiences are considered as legitimate, appropriate, and valid sources of knowledge (Dixson, Rousseau Anderson, & Donnor, 2017). Their experiences are then used to critique traditional claims that schools make about providing equal benefits and opportunities to all children regardless of race (Solórzano, 2016). The experiences of the Black student participants as sources of knowledge (Dixon, Rousseau Anderson, & Donnor, 2017) also provide valuable insights into exposing the harm of distinguishing classes through institutional labels such as "gifted" in Black majority schools.

Gifted Students' Exclusion of Jada from STEM Activities

Jada's exclusion from working on Mission 5. The following episode shows an interaction between Jada (Black female participant, general education), Jordan (Black male, general education), Samiya (Asian female, gifted), Viola (white female, gifted) and Ben (white male, gifted) who were all a part of the Water Facility group during Mission 5. In this interaction, Jada was not given access to the schematic design by her peers. They continued to work on the design by themselves and purposely chose to not listen to or accept Jada's knowledge or contributions to the project. From a CRT perspective, their refusal in allowing Jada to contribute to the project presented inequalities that were consequences of the school district conceding to white demands and keeping self-contained classrooms in tact at Robert Smalls. These inequalities were also based on a racialized hierarchy in which gifted students were at the top. Since gifted students were majority non-Black, this social positioning placed Jada in a subordinate position and continued to perpetuate white dominance within the classroom setting.

The Water Facility group began discussing how to input a waterfall into their water filtration cycle that would recycle dirty water into clean water for the crew on the ship. Jordan suggested a waterfall with a filter attached that would clean the dirty water as it passed over the waterfall through the filter. This idea was praised by Samiya, Ben, and the other group members, except Jada. The following dialogue was taken after Samiya, Ben, and Viola (white female, gifted) agreed to Jordan's waterfall idea and all that was left was to draw the waterfall and the filter that accompanied it. Jordan and Ben were looking together on one laptop for possible waterfall pictures that they could use as a template to draw the waterfall on the poster. They were seated opposite of Jada with the screen faced towards them and away from her. Samiya was also looking on Jordan and Ben's side of the screen.

Jordan: That's not showing how it [waterfall] works, I have a picture right here.

Jada: I ain't get to see.

Jordan: Y'all have this slide right here how the clean water works with the waterfall.

Jada: Can I see?

Samiya: Oh yeah, I see, look at Jordan's [pointing to the other group members].

Jordan : This is how it works.

Samiya: So, let's make this a little thinner [as she draws the waterfall with Ben based on Jordan's picture that he found online]

Jada : Oh my god! So, can I see the paper? I know how to draw a waterfall.

Ben: I know how to draw it better (Audio Recording, October 22, 2015).

Catering to white dominant interests, as Bell (2004) notes, continues to benefit a racial hierarchy in which white people are at the top. For Jada, her social positioning within this racial

hierarchy, as a Black female who was not in the gifted program put her at a disadvantage when compared to her gifted peers. For example, when Ben heard Jada's agency in letting them know that she could draw the waterfall, Ben simply told her that he could draw it better. What made Ben assume that he could draw the waterfall better than Jada when neither of them actually had their own waterfall drawings to show? This assumption was based on his status as a gifted student. When Ben evaluated Jada's artistic ability without even seeing an example of her waterfall, he assumed and judged Jada's perceived artistic abilities based on her status as a Black general education student. Ben's comments were made within a racial hierarchy that put him above Jada as a white male in the gifted program. In not dismantling self-contained gifted from Robert Smalls, the school district continued to support inequitable outcomes for Black students because of the racial hierarchy formed where white gifted students were at the top.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also explain, "U.S. society is based on property rights" (p. 55) which was an important aspect of CRT. In this context, the property rights within Robert Smalls were the intellectual rights in controlling and having the final say in the STEM activities. Both white and Asian students from the gifted classroom benefited more from STEM offerings by limiting Jada's access to the STEM project. Jada struggled with physically viewing and gaining access to the design: "I ain't get to see", "Can I see?" Jada, in the audio recording, also pleaded multiple times with her group members to gain access to the design schematic, yet none of her group members acknowledged her request. The district's concession to keep a self-contained gifted classroom created an environment of inequality in which the "intellectual" property rights of white gifted students were protected in the form of full access to the STEM activity while marginalized students of color like Jada had little to no access. Jada's exclusion

from experiencing the STEM activity and learning from it also contributes to an inequitable system that continues to benefit white privileged families over Black students.

CRT also challenges the traditional claims that institutions make in providing equal and fair opportunities for all children (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016), since catering to white dominant interests perpetuates a system where children of color are marginalized (Bell, 2004). Jada's experiences as a valid source of knowledge provides a counternarrative (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017) that challenges the school district's notion that a self-contained gifted program at Robert Smalls is beneficial for the Black school population. Furthermore, Robert Smalls viewed the STEM magnet as a major benefit for the Black students attending the school because the mere introduction of STEM projects would provide exposure to Black students who previously had none. However, a racialized hierarchy in which white gifted students protected their access to and control of the STEM activities marginalized Jada by unfairly denying her access to Mission 5.

Jada's lack of access to the project also points to deeper issues in magnet based schools that are a response to the geographic prejudice of white families in the community and the ensuing consequences (Soja, 2010). Implementing a novel and exciting STEM curriculum to try and entice white families from the south end, should not be the main goal of a school with a Black majority. Instead, they should ensure equal access for all students to the STEM curriculum especially when classes with different institutional labels (i.e. gifted, general education) work together on the projects. The teachers on a regular basis saw Jada's lack of access, yet no intervention took place to make sure that Jada also had a voice in her group. If students' lack of access remain unaddressed, Black student voices will continue to be marginalized in magnet-based schools.

Jada, later in this same episode, was recorded saying multiple times to Ben and Samiya, who unofficially took charge of the group proceedings, “No, let me draw,” “Let me draw,” “I want to draw,” “Can I draw?” “Can I draw?” “Let me draw it,” “Let me draw it!” (Audio Recording, October 22, 2015). Jada asked to draw the waterfall seven times within two minutes. After the two minutes, Jada took matters into her own hands and drew her own version of the waterfall on a separate piece of paper, trying to demonstrate her drawing ability to those around her. The exchange below took place after she finished her own drawing. Jada tried to show her group members her waterfall in order to prove she could contribute to the schematic design. Jada began to show her own rendition of the waterfall to Samiya (Asian female, gifted), Ben (white male, gifted), and Viola (white female, gifted), wanting approval so she could contribute to the waterfall design. Only Viola responded.

Jada: I am trying to draw a waterfall. See look. [Holds it up.] See look, I drew a waterfall. [Holds it up again.]

[Other students in group do not look at Jada’s waterfall as she holds it up.]

Viola: You don’t even have the rest of it. It just looks like it is going into the abyss.

Jada: This is the dir...I mean the dirt.

Viola: Yeah, we know it's dirt. So it looks like no water is going into the ditch (Audio Recording, October 22, 2015).

CRT argues that Jada’s experiences should be valued as first-hand accounts that are legitimate and integral to pointing out structural forms of racism embedded within schools (Bell, 1987). In this example, Jada persisted in trying to contribute to the group drawing; however, her interaction with Viola continued to marginalize her and kept her from contributing to the project.

Jada's attempt to "audition" in front of her peers is deeply troubling. Viola's status, within the racialized hierarchy at Robert Smalls, unofficially places her in a superior, evaluative position over Jada. Viola's evaluation, like Ben's before, critiques Jada as not having sufficient knowledge to be able to draw the waterfall properly. Viola's claim that Jada did not have the necessary knowledge to contribute was due to missing technical components such as where the waterfall was going. Because the Water Facility group was responsible for recycling water, the waterfall was a function of that process. Thus, when Viola noted that the waterfall in Jada's drawing was going into the abyss, she was evaluating Jada's understanding of how to recycle and filter water.

Viola's evaluation of Jada could be interpreted as a legitimate critique of Jada's understanding of how waterfalls work. However, as Bell (2004) argues, the voices of people of color who have been historically marginalized in school spaces must be taken seriously. In this example, it is not Viola's evaluation of Jada that should take center stage, but Jada's contribution being denied and judged that should be of serious concern. The STEM offerings at Robert Small were supposed to provide better opportunities for Black student while at the same time fostering desegregation by enticing white families to the school. But as Jada's experience shows, she was repeatedly denied access to a STEM project that should have been a learning opportunity for her and not an audition of her skills. Her repeated denial by Viola and Ben from the gifted program continues to challenge and counter the traditional claim that school districts create equal opportunities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) for all students within its care.

Jada's exclusion from working on the Shower Gel Lab. Jada's experiences of being marginalized during the STEM lab were not only limited to Mission 5, but also occurred during the Shower Gel Lab. During this lab, Jada (Black female participant, general education) worked

with Judy (Latina female, general education) and Allison (white female, gifted education). This new project presented an opportunity for Jada to work with a new group in a new setting. The fieldnote excerpt below describes an event in which Jada tried to participate and contribute to the lab work. Similar to her experience in Mission 5, Jada was again excluded by her gifted peer.

> Jada began to measure and then break down the Glycol Stearate. Glycol Stearate is composed of lumpy flakes and Jada was trying to break off a piece in order to be able to add small amounts to the scale while measuring. Allison noticed Jada was taking too long, and took the bottle from her and began to measure it herself without asking Jada first. Jada's body demeanor changed and she put her head down on the table on top of her clenched fists. While her head was down, she said loudly, "Fine, you do all of it!" Eventually Allison and Judy walked over to the hotplate in order to melt the shower gel mixture. I went over with them but Jada did not join us. She wandered around the room for a bit, but eventually came back to the hotplate to rejoin her partners. When she came back, she told them that they have to add a certain compound on the table and points to it before adding coloring and the scents to the shower gel mixture. Allison does not say anything in response and continues stirring. Jada then says to Judy, "I thought you were supposed to be the holder." Judy responds that Allison wanted to do it. Jada then asks Allison for her turn to stir the mixture on the hot plate. Allison rolls her eyes and gives the stirring stick to Jada but tells her, "You have to keep stirring it" (Field Notes, November 9, 2015).

In this event, we see Allison taking a dominant role over Jada and Judy. Allison evaluates Jada's handling of glycol stearate as too slow, and physically takes over the experiment without Jada's permission. She then takes a role that Judy had wanted ("the holder"), and finally allows Jada to

stir the mixture, though begrudgingly (evident through her eye rolling). Conversely, Jada and Judy are forced into subordinate roles during this activity. Even though Jada was the first group member to break off the glycol stearate, this position is physically taken away from her by Allison. Jada's verbal ("Fine, you do all of it!") and body language (head down on the table, clenched fists) indicate how distressing Allison's action was for her. After rejoining the group, Jada's suggestion to add a compound to the table went ignored by Allison. Jada manages to acquire a turn at stirring the mixture, but only after being met with Allison's eye rolling. Judy, too, is forced into subordination to Allison's demands. As Jada indicates, though Judy was "supposed to be the holder," she was forced to placate Allison's desire to be "the holder."

The distribution of roles by Allison, Jada, and Judy are clearly designated by their institutionalized labels—gifted and general education. The interactions above are more than students "not sharing" or needing a "social skills" lesson. There is a pattern of Allison taking a dominant role, and Jada and Judy being forced into subordinate roles. This pattern of "gifted" students taking dominant roles within learning contexts, and forcing general education students into subordinate roles is consistent with data in this chapter and in chapter five. We see, therefore, how the racialized hierarchy discussed at the beginning of this chapter is enacted in the event above. CRT asserts that white dominance and racism are endemic in all fabrics of society, and are normalized in institutionalized practices. The event between Allison, Jada, and Judy is an example of how white dominance is normalized within an institution that has utilized STEM and self-contained gifted programs to cater to white interests. The interactions between these students are examples of institutionalized practices that manifest racism and white supremacy. Thus, CRT allows us to see how Allison's actions are not simply about a student who needs to share, but point to larger structures that exist for white interests.

However, even though Jada was constrained by Allison's evaluation and judgment of her skills and knowledge of the lab procedures, Jada demonstrated her agency in her persistence to be a part of the STEM lab work. Even after Jada initially placed her head on the desk and yelled "fine, you do all of it," she eventually returned asking for her turn to stir the mixture. She did not allow the evaluation to stop her from continuing to find ways to engage in the STEM work. Her resilience as she persisted in wanting to participate shows her willingness to not let Allison's critiques completely shut her out of the activity. Why is her resilience necessary in the first place? In responding to Jada's experiences, modifications need to be made to the way social interactions occur during the STEM time to promote more equality with STEM access.

Gifted Students Delegation of Subordinate Roles to Jacoby and Andrew

Jacoby's subordinated role in Mission 5. Jada's experience is validated and contextualized by other students' reported feelings and experiences. In this first data point, Jacoby (Black male participant, general education), Madelyn (white female, gifted), Aiden (Black male, general education), Yaasir (white male, gifted), and Sierra (Black female, general education) were all in the same Greenhouse group for Mission 5, and Adam (Black male, general education) was in another group. In the first dialogue, Jacoby, Aiden, Adam, and Sierra reflected on their time working with their peers from the gifted classroom during Mission 5. The gifted classroom was taking Fall picture day photos in the library, which meant that the other two general education classrooms had time to work together on the schematic design without any gifted students present.

Jacoby: They was barely letting us do anything.

Aiden: Exactly, they was just going by what they wanted to do. Not letting the whole group…[interrupted]

Jacoby: Madelyn was acting like…[interrupted] Marlow was just acting like…[interrupted]

Sierra: And Yaasir. Yaasir kept disagreeing with our group. [interrupted]

Jacoby: Madelyn was acting like she was the freakin' leader. Was no leader or nothing. Everyday she be...oh no we don't need this because [whining noise]

[Adam from a different group walks over to join the conversation.]

Aiden: They didn't even ask stuff without even...[interrupted]

Jacoby: Exactly!

Aiden: [continues] Trying to see what the group wanted… [interrupted by Adam]

Adam: Same with our group…

Aiden: Wait, wait Adam…[interrupted again]

Adam: Bryan, JT, Don, and Tanner. They think they can copy…

Aiden: That's the gifted class. You know they gonna...they gonna add everything… [interrupted]

Jacoby: Exactly. Madelyn. She act like...she act like it's the whole leader of the thing.

Adam: Exactly.

Aiden: Exactly, I don't like that. They need to ask the group if we all agree before they[45] add it (Audio Recording, October 27, 2015).

In this transcript, Jacoby and Aiden complained that Madelyn assumed the dominant role as the leader. By default, Jacoby and Aiden were then placed into subordinate roles under her

[45] "gifted" students

authority. Jacoby mentioned twice how Madelyn assumed the role of leader even though there was no such assigned role within the group. Jacoby then discussed how Madelyn, after assuming the dominant role, restricted Jacoby from contributing ("They was barely letting us do anything") and also deciding what contributions were allowed to stay and which were not ("oh no we don't need this because"). Like Jada, Jacoby did not have the same access to the project as Madelyn, a student from gifted. He was relegated into a subordinate role that he did not choose for himself. Adam, from another group, found similar participatory patterns within his own group with Bryan, JT, Don, and Tanner who were all from the gifted classroom. Their common experiences in having gifted students try and take control was unacceptable to them. When Aiden said, "that's the gifted class," he was recollecting on his experiences of gifted students frequently trying to take over the group project.

Aiden and Jacoby's experiences are important because CRT asserts that the experiential knowledge of people of color are valid and legitimate sources of knowledge that expose the inequalities within U.S. public schools (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Using this framework, I interpret Jacoby, Aiden, and Adam's perspectives as legitimate sources of knowledge. Their experiences expose the inequalities within this STEM program. Similar to Jada's experience previously mentioned in this chapter, Jacoby's experience of being forced into the subordinate role is evidence of how racism is normalized within the STEM program. The institutional label as gifted gave certain students a precedent to take leadership within the group setting, especially when working with their non-gifted, general education peers.

As the district sought to desegregate Robert Smalls, self-contained gifted program was used to attract white students into the school. Therefore, these common occurrences of the gifted students taking over projects had palpable consequences in who had greater access to the STEM

projects. This description of the gifted classroom was rooted in Jacoby, Aiden, and Adam's possible frustrations with not having their voice heard or having full access to Mission 5. This lack of inclusion took away and limited Jacoby, Aiden, and Adam's opportunities to contribute and make decisions on the STEM project. This unequal access is problematic since magnet programs are implemented to promote racial inclusiveness and educational equality. But peer relationships between gifted and general education students limited and harmed Black students' opportunities to participate in STEM projects.

Jacoby, Aiden, and Adam's experiences and agency in expressing their frustration and complaints about the actions of their gifted peers are important when considering how to improve STEM magnet access. Based on CRT, when thinking about how to address these unequal outcomes, Jacoby, Aiden, and Adam's experiences address three areas that should be considered. The first is regarding who is allowed to do which part of the project. Jacoby stated, "They was barely letting us do anything." This statement shows that his gifted peers restricted his access from participating fully in the project; in fact, he was barely allowed to do anything. When a self-contained gifted classroom works together with the general education classroom, Jacoby's experience teaches us to watch carefully how students regulate each other within the group setting. If gifted students are limiting general education students' access to the STEM learning opportunities, those limitations must be addressed.

The second area of concern was mentioned by Sierra, "Yaasir kept disagreeing with our group." While disagreement happens in most groups, the source or cause of why he disagrees must be better understood in order to see if disagreement was used as a tool to prevent someone else's input in the final design. Sierra's statement that "Yaasir **kept** disagreeing" insisted that he disagreed consistently and was notable problem she witnessed when working with Yaasir, a

gifted student. If disagreements are used to diminish other students' opinions and contributions, measures must be put in place to make sure one person is not able to diminish the contributions of another.

The third area of concern dealt with group consensus. Aiden was upset because "they didn't even ask stuff without even…trying to see what the group wanted." He later stated, "I don't like that." Adam, who was from another group, agreed with Aiden's complaint because it related to his own experiences within his own group. There was no process for group consensus, which resulted in the gifted peers adding design components without consulting the group. Aiden and Adam's statements show that these behaviors were common in at least two of these groups. Aiden added what he wanted from the group: "They need to ask the group if we all agree before they add it." This comment shows that Aiden wanted a fair and equal process in which all group members had time to discuss and decide on an idea before adding it to the board. Adding an idea to the board before getting group consensus meant that Aiden's consideration of those ideas were not wanted or valued. Undervaluation of Aiden's knowledge to contribute ideas is problematic if magnet is intended to provide a more robust and equal education to Black students.

Jacoby, Aiden, and Sierra's collective experiences can teach schools how to assess programs that cater to white interests but harm Black general education students based on peer social relations. CRT also challenges "traditional claims that education institutions make toward…equal opportunity" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Just because a magnet was implemented at Robert Smalls, did not guarantee a better education for Black students. Rather, the experiences of Black students as legitimate sources are needed in order to determine whether or not equal opportunities are present. In this episode, Sierra, Aiden, Jacoby, and Adam's

experiences showed unequal access to STEM opportunities based on their social interactions with peers from the gifted classroom.

Andrew's subordinate roles during the Shower Gel Project. Andrew (Black male participant, general education), Michael (Black male, general education) and Bryan (white male, gifted) were partnered up by the teachers to work on the Shower Gel Lab together. During this episode, Bryan took control of the group, appointed himself as the de facto leader, and gave directions to Andrew and Michael. Bryan in this dialogue dictates to Michael and Andrew about what they should be doing and how to follow the lab instructions correctly in order to make the shower gel.

Bryan: Who wants to do Peg 7?

Michael: Me!

[...]

Bryan: Okay, we are good. Put in your PEG 7.

Michael: In this?

Andrew: Okay, the next things to do is put the Coco. 4 millimeters. 4...

Bryan: No, that's…

Andrew: I mean six. Six. I meant six. Coco.

Bryan: Wait, let me see what five is. Alright go. Stop. A little bit less. Right now it's eight. Less. Two less. What's it at. Got to keep it flat. [Andrew was holding the beaker in the air instead of laying it flat on the table]

Andrew: Oh is that one to three, four. It's at four. It's at four.

Bryan: Okay I think that's good. No, no that's at six. The long one means five, so it's one above five. Do you want to pour it in the beaker?

Andrew: Yeah.

Bryan: We got that. And now we need...

Andrew: [Interrupting.] Okay, now carefully add Phase, uh can you add Phase B to Phase A and stir until…[Reads the directions from his sheet.]

Bryan: No, we still need to add glocal suphate (glycol stearate). Wait zeroing, zeroing, don't touch it. Okay it's at zero. Open this guys, I can't open it.

Andrew: I got it.

[...]

Bryan: Let go of the beaker with the other hand. Let go of the beaker with the other hand. Because it is going to get hot really soon. Michael! The other hand. That hand. Don't touch it with that hand. Stir it with that one. Now you want to stir it? One hand, because that is going to get really hot. Do you want to stir it? That's right, get it hot, get it smooth. Andrew are you wanting another turn? Can you let Andrew try? Because it is going to be here for a long time (Audio Recording, 11.5.15).

Bryan, in this example, assumes the dominant role in giving directions regarding the lab procedures. Bryan enacts this dominant role by commanding, correcting, evaluating, teaching, and assigning roles to Andrew and Michael. He commanded Andrew by giving him specific instructions during the lab work ("Okay, the next thing to do is..."). Bryan also corrected Andrew's understanding of the directions by saying, "No, that's..." after Andrew read some directions out loud. In so doing, Bryan exerted his assumed authority over Andrew within the lab setting. Bryan also evaluated how Andrew measured the different chemical substances by watching him measure each substance and making comments on adding more or taking some

away. He also assigned roles to Andrew and Michael by asking who wanted to do Peg 7 and who wanted to stir the beaker.

Bryan assuming the leadership role meant that he controlled the lab activity and assigned menial tasks to Andrew and Michael to complete. In the scenario above it is clear that Bryan (white male, gifted) was benefiting from his assumed leadership as he took charge of the lab work. Andrew and Michael were relegated into minor roles that perpetuated racist constructs in which Black students were not provided equal access to leadership roles as their white peers.

Bryan evaluating and taking charge of this activity impacted the way that Andrew participated in the activity. Instead of co-sharing the role of giving instructions out, Bryan took over the lab by giving instructions and making evaluations based on how Andrew and Michael handled the assigned tasks. For example, Bryan began to micromanage Andrew's participation by giving commands such as "wait," "alright go," "stop," "a little bit less," "less," "two less," "got to keep it flat." These commands (e.g., go, stop, less) and evaluations (e.g., got to keep it flat) towards Andrew placed him in the subordinate position, a kind of lab assistant for Bryan. The experiences of leading are different than assisting. Leaders can make decisions and adjustments, as well as learn through actively taking part in the lab. Assistants follow someone else's orders. The tension between the subordinate role and the leader delineates the racialized context of the self-contained gifted and general education classrooms at Robert Small.

The gifted classroom being majority white and Asian and the general education class being majority Black in this instance meant that a white male student was commanding a Black male student in the laboratory. The implications of this racialized context meant that Black students like Andrew and Michael had fewer opportunities to take charge and lead the lab activity and instead were delegated to less meaningful roles within the racialized peer

interactions at Robert Smalls. Their experiences are especially illuminating since the district promoted self-contained gifted as a valued program to help desegregate Robert Smalls by catering to white interests. Referencing white academic interests, however, came at a cost based on the social interactions of Bryan, Andrew, and Michael. If pairing gifted students with general education students (non-gifted) limits Black students' access to meaningful STEM experiences, the assumption that the pairing will benefit both parties should be reexamined. Jada, Andrew and Michael's experiences should be used to bring about a more equitable process when partnering for STEM work. Gifted students should not assume the leadership role and make general education students their lab assistants; rather students should co-lead and co-assist in order to make sure that all participants have equal access and opportunities to learn important concepts from the STEM lab work. Further, the school district should take a hard look at the consequences for Black students when a gifted program is used to bring more white students into a predominantly Black school with the label of gifted and talented. These class distinctions between gifted and general education create social barriers that affect peer status that can further marginalize general education students as students who are not gifted and talented.

On the second day Andrew, Michael, and Bryan were in the lab, the group dynamics changed. An absent student meant that one of the female gifted students lost their sole partner for that day. I heard Bryan asking Andrew and Michael if they thought he should join her for the day. Andrew was first to speak up and suggested that Bryan go and work with her. After receiving approval from the group, Bryan volunteered to work with his "gifted" peer and Andrew and Michael were left alone in conducting the lab. During this time, I watched to see what would happen without Bryan's presence in the group. The following excerpt from an analytic memo based on my field notes describes their experience without Bryan.

> Between Andrew and Michael, Andrew took ownership of reading the directions. But instead of ordering Michael with specific commands, reminders, or corrections, they worked together to complete the lab. Andrew read the instructions and gave the task that had to be completed. Michael listened to Andrew giving the task and then completed it with no added critique, judgment, or admonishment. They checked the measurements together. If too much was added, Michael or Andrew would simply remove the extra amount. They took time to find the correct chemical ingredients, double checking to make sure they were not mixing the wrong chemicals together. They both participated in weighing, adding the chemical substance, and mixing the mixture together. And when they had a question, they asked Ms. Jenkins and other general education peers instead of asking Bryan. This was important to note because Bryan sat with his new partner at a table right next to Andrew and Michael's. He was within arm's reach. He was so close that his voice was still recorded on the mic that sat on Andrew's table. But not once did they ask Bryan about how to complete a step or if they had the right measurement (Analytic Memo, 11.10.15).

When I re-read this analytic memo, it highlighted Andrew's capability in taking the lead when Bryan was not present. Andrew equally sought after control over the group process but was limited due to Bryan assuming the unofficial leadership role.

Without Bryan there to command, critique, and admonish, Andrew and Michael were free to work through the lab process rather than taking orders from Bryan. Interestingly, when Andrew and Michael did have questions, they chose to ask their peers from the general education classroom instead of their partner who was sitting at the next table. At one point, I saw Andrew go three tables over to ask a friend instead of asking Bryan who was within arm's reach. This

choice in not including Bryan points to the unequal distribution of work that took place within their group the day prior. Andrew and Michael's experience of freedom is crucial if STEM curriculum in earlier grades are geared toward giving students experiences to inspire future STEM careers. They needed to feel the freedom to work, make mistakes, or succeed without constant supervision of another peer. Further, limiting Andrew's potential for leadership when interacting with gifted peers continues to push a narrative that if one is not in the gifted class, than one is not gifted. Later in that session, I asked Andrew how he liked working as a group with others. He responded by saying:

> Most of the time I like working by myself, because some people they like to be control of mostly everything, and then they won't, then some people won't let you do anything, like they want to do all of the project (Audio Recording, November 10, 2015).

As observed during the labs, Andrew's gifted peer, however unintentionally, creates inequitable access to STEM related projects, and this fact is fully acknowledged by Andrew. Being limited in what one can do based on the status of not being in the gifted classroom places an unfair burden on Andrew as he is relegated to minor roles. For students like Andrew, exposure to a STEM program at Robert Smalls is not enough. Those with institutional power should address the continued inequalities that are embedded within the structure of the school by the placement of self-contained gifted programs that cater to white interests at the cost of Black student experiences in engaging equally in STEM work.

The fact that Andrew and Michael must find their own agency should be clear indicators that much more attention needs to be paid to student interactions within the STEM setting. Conflicts based on social interactions between students labeled gifted and general education

students have negative implications for Black student participants seeking full access to all that the STEM curriculum. The inequitable access problem should be addressed in order to provide more meaningful opportunities that do not relegate Black students to minor roles.

Conclusion

Placing a self-contained gifted classroom at Robert Smalls was a double-edged sword. On one side, the gifted program was attractive enough for white and Asian families to set aside their geographic biases (Soja, 2010) and enroll in a north end school. On the other side, catering to white interests in maintaining a self-contained gifted program, was another example of white supremacy's pervasiveness within public schools (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013). By conceding to white demands, the school district was complicit in supporting a system of white dominance at the expense of Black students at Robert Smalls. Conforming to white interests also had consequences within the peer interactions that limited the opportunities to engage in STEM learning for the Black participants.

Based on the first hand accounts from the Black participants, white gifted students infringed on Jacoby, Andrew, and Jada's learning by excluding them from contributing to the work, assuming leadership roles, and pushing them into subordinate roles. When considering the ways in which Andrew, Jacoby, and Jada were marginalized within the STEM activities, it is important, as CRT notes, that "a radical critique of the status quo and purported reforms" (p. 49) is necessary over accepting the status quo. In this case, the status quo was that magnet reform would bring about greater equality for Black students. However, catering the gifted program towards white interests, no matter the intention toward benefitting the Black community, maintained a status quo that supported a system of white supremacy.

A radical critique then, of the magnet reform and continuance of the gifted program, asks the fundamental question: who benefited most from these programs? The answer to this question is clearly the white gifted students. The white gifted students had more opportunities to lead activities as they assumed leadership roles. They had more in-depth experiences with the STEM activities as they limited the contribution of their Black general education peers. They also gained more from participating in the activities while they either ignored Jada's requests to be included or as they assigned menial tasks, like Andrew's experience with Bryan. In these ways, the placement of the gifted program at Robert Smalls infringed on the learning of Black fifth grade students from the general education classroom and shows the ways in which racism continue to permeate the everyday activities within the magnet context.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The use of magnet programs in U.S. schools has contributed to the transformation of what should be a public good into a private commodity (Orfield, 2013). In an effort to desegregate Black majority schools, school districts have implemented magnet programs that promote parent choice over forced integration. In adopting magnet programs, school districts have conceded to white families' resistance to integrating with Black and Brown students. Adopted magnet programs also catered to white families' curricular demands, as they were the targeted audience. This use of magnet programs as a commodity that prioritizes white interests over those of Black families is consistent with the tenets of CRT, which assert that white supremacy is endemic and normalized in U.S. society (Bell, 1987). The findings, from this study, suggest the production and outcomes of magnet programs follow that of its inception--the catering to and benefit of white families. I argue that magnet programs normalize white supremacy by functioning under the premise that Black majority schools are "inferior" and require school districts to cater to white curricular interests for the purposes of benefiting Black students through desegregation.

Within the city of Prairie, magnet programs were also used for the same purposes as described at the beginning of this chapter. Magnet and gifted programming was adopted at Robert Smalls STEM Academy in order to reform the school by desegregating its Black student majority. However, white parents have become more reluctant in Prairie to send their children to schools on the north end that were majority Black. In the 1960s when Robert Smalls first adopted an arts magnet, there was a waiting list for white families to get into the school since full time art teachers were not at any of the other elementary schools. But with the ubiquitous use of magnet programs across the country including within the city of Prairie, the novelty of

specialized programs do not have the immense sway that they did several decades ago. In order for white families to set aside their biases and enroll their children in a Black majority school, white parents have demanded more from magnet programs. The self-contained gifted program represents conceding to these additional white parents' demands, in an effort to desegregate north end schools. Prairie school district's choice to cater more to white interests in the form of these specialized programs was not without consequences. The summaries below provide a description of the consequences for Black student participants. The summaries document acceptance, continuation, and support of white supremacy by Prairie's school district.

Summary of Findings

The importance of the local context and history to magnet reform. In the city of Prairie, white families who lived mostly in the south end of town racially discriminated against elementary schools on the north end of town. This discrimination against north end schools exposed the underlying racism that the white community had with integrating in Black majority schools. There was a stigma in the community regarding the "inferiority" of Black majority schools and white parents were reluctant to send their children there. White parents racially based, geographic discrimination of all north end elementary schools posed a major issue for the district who was tasked to desegregate these schools. This "struggle over geography" (Soja, 2010) eventually contributed to the school district adopting a magnet program in the hopes that white parents would set aside their discriminatory apprehensions and enroll their children in a Black majority north end school. White parents reluctance to send their children to north end schools and the district's adoption of a magnet program had daily consequences within the classroom for Black students as described in the next two sections.

Magnet constraints over Black student needs. The school district's use of magnet programs in north end schools was a response to white parents' racism towards schools with high Black student enrollment. The district's use of magnet programming that specifically catered to white interests also came with a set of consequences within the everyday experiences of the Black fifth grade students who attended Robert Smalls. Transforming a school into a theme-based institution is no simple feat, especially when the district continues to mandate the traditional curriculum. Inclusion of STEM content, as an extra program, meant there was limited time to complete everything within the academic timeframe. Therefore, the time constraints within the program were strictly enforced.

This strict enforcement of the magnet time constraints was problematic for me as an observer because as issues and needs arose from the Black students participating in the STEM project, teachers ignored and sidestepped their needs in order to complete the project. For example, after Madelyn withheld Jacoby's turn by keeping the talking stick, and Jacoby expressed frustration over the event, Ms. Stuart removed Jacoby from the classroom rather than address his learning needs. His behavior conflicted with the magnet time constraints and he was removed to another room. Another example is when Andrew tried to stay longer to work on his group's schematic design and tried to explain why he had to stay, only to be sent back without any regard for his needs because his time was up. These data point to the consequences of a STEM magnet reform focused on attracting white families to Robert Smalls by catering to their curricular interests and is an example of the ways in which racism is normalized within everyday institutional practices (Ladson-Billings, 2013). These findings addressed how students experienced learning opportunities related to the magnet reform efforts in Prairie school district.

Their magnet and STEM experiences were limited due to the implementation of a magnet program not explicitly designed for their academic needs.

Racialized hierarchy between gifted and general education students. Gifted programming like magnet programming was focused on catering to the interest of white families. Self-contained gifted programming provided the "benefit of" attending Robert Smalls without integrating the Black majority student population. In this way, white gifted students could benefit from the gifted program, STEM curriculum, and still stay segregated from the Black majority student population within the confines of the school building. However, in so doing, the district helped contribute to a racialized hierarchy that had consequences within the peer interactions at Robert Smalls.

White gifted students, supported by a racialized hierarchy based on institutional labels of gifted and non-gifted (general education), infringed on Jacoby, Andrew, and Jada's learning by excluding them from contributing to the work, assuming leadership roles, and pushing them into subordinate roles. For white gifted students to assume leadership roles and assign subordinate roles to the Black participants, reinforced a racial hierarchy engrained within schools that placed whites at the top (Bell, 2004; Welner & Carter, 2013). The white gifted students also had more opportunities to lead activities as they assumed leadership roles. They had more in depth experiences with the STEM activities as they limited the contribution of their Black peers. They also gained more from participating in the activities by assigning the Black participants menial tasks to complete. In these ways, the placement of the gifted program at Robert Smalls infringed on the learning of the main Black participants and shows the ways in which racism continue to permeate the everyday STEM activities.

Discussion of Findings

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that CRT is "a radical critique both of the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 62). In this case study, the status quo was the acceptance by the district of white families' racialized biases against north end schools. The purported reforms were the magnet and gifted programs meant to address these racialized biases. Because racism is normalized, ordinary, and pervasive within American society (Bell, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017), a radical critique is needed in order to make sure these magnet reforms do not just provide incremental changes that are just good enough, but instead address fully the inequalities for students of color (Tushnet, 1987, p. 43). This radical critique also questions the use and purpose of magnet programs within a school district. In Prairie, the magnet and gifted programs were used as a private commodity to attract white parents into Black majority schools. Therefore, magnet reforms that promote white dominance by not confronting racialized biases and instead cater to white curricular interests should be critically examined to see if the programs benefit Black students when compared to their white peers.

Serious consequences of access and equity for Black students were constantly observed at Robert Smalls. I argue that focusing on the development and dissemination of magnet programs alone is not enough to address the white supremacist ideologies within Prairie school district. If white interests continually require more resources, more benefits, and more enticements, the district's choice to continue chasing these interests directly disadvantages Black children since their needs are not the true focus of the magnet reform. Magnet programs also accept the notion that Black majority schools are "inferior" therefore needing additional programs to entice families from the white community (Frankenberg, 2013). This notion situates Black minds as "inferior" to white minds and promotes a racial hierarchy that was observed as the white gifted

students actively limited the contributions and access of the Black participants within the STEM setting.

If educational equality for Black students in the city of Prairie is to improve, the ways in which magnet programs continue to privilege white students over Black students must be exposed, identified, and eliminated. This, of course, will be no easy feat as white families in the community will not put aside their interests for more and better opportunities for their own children. Still, that must be the goal. Enacting magnet programs in the hopes of having an enticing commodity capable of single handedly desegregating schools is misguided, if there is no acknowledgment that magnets in and of themselves continue to support and benefit white families' dominant interests.

There also may be educational reformers who argue that the structure of magnet reform can be changed in order to address the radical critiques that I laid forth in the preceding paragraphs. However, even if the structure of the magnet reform was changed in the city of Prairie, magnet programs by themselves could not overcome the racism embedded within the geography of the community. Choosing a school means also understanding the embedded racism and injustices within that school's geography. North end schools were discriminated against by white families in the community and would not be so easily deconstructed or forgotten because of the magnet program. The racialized stigma that north end schools carried within the community of Prairie will not be discarded because of a new magnet theme.

Racism was embedded within the geography of each school in the city of Prairie. Therefore, without understanding and addressing the racial injustices embedded within a school's reputation based on its geography, magnet programs provided only incremental progress that did little to confront the glaring inequalities present within these schools. This intersection

between race and geography must be taken into account during any reform process aimed at desegregation.

Implication for School Districts

School districts must take a good hard look at the racial and geographic biases within their own district. If mid-size school districts were honest, they would be able to rank which schools were more popular with different segments of the community and why. Magnet programs, while having a lot of good press and plenty of research that supports its use, is founded on the acceptance of white racial bias against Black majority schools. Magnet programs further support white privilege by tailoring programs to meet white interests instead of focusing on and addressing Black students' academic and social needs.

Racism is not only endemic, it is ordinary and normalized within American society (Bell, 1987) and embedded within the geography of a community (Soja, 2010). In order to combat the embedded racial biases within a school's geographic location in a community, the school district must do more than just show that they are trying to address these issues through magnet programming. School districts must take the issue of white supremacy head on and not accept it as a normalized precept within the community. If school districts only concede to the demand of white families, Black students' needs will continue to be only a second thought.

Orfield (2013) argues that, "not all choice mechanisms are good. Some may cause additional harm depending on the nature of the choice offered and the validity of the assumptions on which it rests. Something may sound good but turn out to be deeply disappointing, or what looks like a simple pathway to opportunity may turn out to be a complex path with many turns and dangers" (p. 80). He also argued that, "too often choice has been assumed to be good in and of itself" (p. 15). Based on Orfield's claim and the data from this study, the lesson for school

districts is to take a closer look at their choice system given the racialized struggles within their city, and root out unfair elements. The continued use of magnet programs within choice systems that are judged largely on whether or not white families' are attracted to a Black majority school does a disservice for all the Black students whose needs are not mentioned. Furthermore, the sole focus on desegregation as the best method in improving equality for Black students in public schools must be challenged and radically critiqued as indicated by the Black participants' experiences during STEM activities. Just because more white students attend a Black majority school does not mean Black students have equal opportunities as Andrew, Jacoby, and Jada's experiences show.

Limitations

One major limitation to this study was the amount of time spent collecting data. The data collection period was over a span of two months, which limited the amount of interactions and events that could have been observed. With a longer data collection period, the assertions made in this study could be strengthened with a variety of additional experiences garnered through the interactions of the focal participants to their STEM and school setting. Another limitation in this study was that most of the fieldwork was done only as a participant observer in the classroom. In hindsight, doing more teacher interviews, trying to find ways to interview district officials even though they were reluctant, and to interview community members such as parents and activists would have broadened and provided additional perspective to the data set. Another limitation is that the students in this study attended the school prior to its transformation to a STEM Academy. Therefore, it can be argued that some of the ways students have been socialized could have occurred pre-transformation to A STEM magnet. Some researchers also may argue that the lack of generalizability was problematic in this study. However, the primary concern of case

study methodology is not in generalizability but in better understanding the phenomenon of interest by intense study and collection of qualitative based evidence. The phenomenon of interest in this case better informs districts who have similar issues to take a clear and honest look into their practices and to see whether or not their practices benefit Black children within their district. If Black children's needs are relegated to the backseat and they are given the status of being secondary beneficiaries instead of as primary beneficiaries, the question must be asked, who benefits the most from this program?

Directions for Future Research

When considering future research, one interesting future direction is to conduct a multiple case study to compare different magnet based schools within the same district. The local context would be the same for each school, however, the ways in which Black student's experience magnet related programs in two different schools within the same district would provide useful data to see common trends between the two sites. This study could also be extended by doing a multiple case study with two different school districts with similar characteristics to better understand the role of local decisions and contexts within magnet programming and the ways in which school district's pursue equality for Black students. A third area of future research could focus on the intersection of race and gender or race and class. While the main focus in this study was on race, CRT agrees with the importance of intersectionality of race with other factors such as gender and class. I would also be interested in exploring how Jada's experiences and agency differed from Jacoby's based on their race and gender. Another area of exploration could focus on the role of gifted education within student interaction in public schools. Having one of the gifted students as a focal participant might provide deeper insights into the social relationships in schools with both self-contained gifted and general

education classrooms.

Another direction of future research is to follow other students at Robert Smalls who would add meaningful viewpoints to this case study. For example, what were the Asian American students' experiences as it related to magnet adoption, as they are not white or Black in this given context. How do Asian American students make sense of their experiences within this setting as they also came from outside the immediate neighborhood to access the gifted services and STEM programming at Robert Smalls. Another direction might also take the white students' perspectives on how they experienced their everyday schooling at Robert Smalls. These different vantage points would offer important insight into how the interactions within a school act as a microcosm of larger racial equity issues facing U.S. society. These additional case studies could add a degree of richness to better understanding the daily experiences of children who attend a school undergoing magnet reform.

The goal of this research was to study a select set of Black students at Robert Smalls. Other groups, such as Asian American and white Americans were not the focus of this study. Future studies that would include other groups could provide an larger and improved perspective about the school and student experiences.

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APPENDIX: IRB PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Rese

Office for the Protection of Research Subje
805 W Pennsylvania Ave
Urbana, IL 61801

May 11, 2017

Sharon Tettegah
Curriculum and Instruction
383 Education Bldg
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, IL 61820

RE: *African American Students' Experiences with Technology-Oriented Reforms in Public Education*
IRB Protocol Number: 15913

Dear Dr. Tettegah:

You have indicated that your continuing project entitled *African American Students' Experiences with Technology-Oriented Reforms in Public Education,* Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol number 15913, is undergoing data analysis only and that you are no longer gathering data from human subjects. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign IRB has approved, by expedited continuing review, continuation of your project for data analysis only; the approval expires on 05/10/2020.

Because this approval is only for data analysis, you are *not authorized* to involve human subjects in any aspect of the protocol and we have not returned any consent forms related to the project. IRB approval must be obtained to reinitiate enrollment of human subjects in this protocol.

You were granted a three-year approval. If there are any changes to the protocol that result in your study becoming ineligible for the extended approval period, the RPI is responsible for immediately notifying the IRB via an amendment. The protocol will be issued a modified expiration date accordingly.

If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our website at https://www.oprs.research.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Ron Banks, MS, CIP
Human Subjects Research Coordinator, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

c: Amos Lee